

A close-up photograph of cotton bolls on a branch, with some bolls open and white cotton visible. The image is framed by a decorative border of colored squares in shades of orange, green, and grey.

Southwest Georgia Regional Plan Assessment

2017-2022

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Southwest Georgia Welcomes You

INTRODUCTION

The Regional Plan

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), under the Standards and Procedures for Regional Planning, requires that each Regional Commission prepare, adopt, maintain, and implement a regional plan. Once implemented, the plan will allow the region to address critical issues and opportunities, while moving toward its vision for the future.

The purpose of the regional plan is to:

- involve all segments of the region in developing a vision for the future;
- generate pride and enthusiasm as it relates to the future of the region;
- engage the interest of regional policymakers and stakeholders in implementing the plan; and
- provide a guide for everyday decision-making to be utilized by government entities and elected officials.



Southwest Georgia, where life meets at the apex of industry and agriculture

The regional plan also seeks to help advance the following state planning goals:

- an expanding and balanced economy;
- protection of environmental, natural and cultural resources;
- provision of infrastructure and services to support efficient growth and development patterns;
- access and provision of adequate and affordable housing to all residents;
- coordination of land use planning and transportation planning to support sustainable economic development;
- protection of natural and cultural resources; and
- coordination of local planning efforts with other local service providers/authorities, neighboring communities, and state and regional plans.



The Regional Assessment

The Regional Plan Assessment forms the foundation of the regional plan. The assessment includes the following:

- a list of potential issues and opportunities the region may wish to take action to address
- an analysis of projected regional development patterns
- an evaluation of current policies, activities, and development patterns in the region for consistency with DCA's Quality Community Objectives (QCOs)
- an analysis of data and information to check the validity of the above evaluations and the potential issues and opportunities

The task of the Commission is to collect and analyze data relating to the region, which in turn is utilized by decision-makers in developing the all-important regional agenda.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2017

Issues & Opportunities

The Assessment details potential issues and opportunities that face the region that may be considered in the Agenda for further action. While an extensive list of issues and opportunities is in the document the following are critical to Southwest Georgia's continued survival and growth.

The region is bursting with "prime farmland" which presents a clear need to nurture and protect this asset. The area also sits on top of one of the most productive water recharge areas in the world, the Floridian aquifer. This aquifer provides high quality water to most of the region, as well as to a large portion of north Florida. There are also many important surface water resources such as the Flint and Chattahoochee Rivers, and Lake Seminole. Large privately held tracts of land used for hunting are commonly found throughout the region, and are often under conservation easements. The region is ripe with natural resources that support recreational activities, but in many cases, they can only be accessed by car.

Zoning in Southwest Georgia has been a significant issue for the region. While some communities embrace land use ordinances many do not. For many of the smaller communities that do have a zoning ordinance, its most recent update may have not occurred within the last forty years. Developing a workable balance between communities who zone and those who do not while also addressing current development trends will be an ongoing challenge for the future of the region.

Housing presents several issues and opportunities for Southwest Georgia. A recurring issue is that of code enforcement. While many have codes in place, enforcement is lacking. This contributes to the steady decline of the housing stock throughout the region. Many of our communities are very small and rural and having a code enforcement officer on staff is often cost prohibitive.

Transportation has long been a problem throughout the rural areas of the country – Southwest Georgia is no different, although significant steps have been taken over the past decade to address this issue. A coordinated regional transit program is operated by the Regional Commission that provides both public transit services and non-emergency medical transport. However, there is still a need to provide more transportation options within the region that serve every segment of the population.

Southwest Georgia's aging infrastructure is becoming an increasing concern. Communities struggle to provide basic water and sewer to their citizens due to low pricing of services and the high cost of maintenance and repair. Many communities do not make enough revenue off of their utilities to maintain the infrastructure. Since infrastructure is a driving force behind all types of development, the region will need to take a hard look at this issue if it wants to be a contender for future growth opportunities.





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The economy in Southwest Georgia is primarily based on agricultural activities and consequently is greatly influenced by trends in the agricultural markets. The region continues to be a top producer within the State of a variety of crops including cotton, pecans, peanuts and other row crops. Forest products also play a large role in the economy. The unemployment rates in the region are higher than state and national averages. Manufacturing jobs; while on a steady decline over the last decade are principally clustered around the larger cities.

The City of Albany is the regions' economic center with several large regional employers. Industries that have been attracted to the area often provide a strong boost in the creation of unskilled labor positions, but leave few opportunities for skilled labor and managerial positions. A number of Southwest Georgia communities are reliant upon one or two major companies for employment and recognize the need to diversify. All of our counties with the exception of Lee are described as "persistent poverty," where at least 20% of the population is below the poverty threshold for four decades, as measured by the last four consecutive decennial Censuses. Development in Southwest Georgia transitions abruptly from low density housing to agricultural land. For many Southwest Georgia communities any type of development is considered to be good development.

Accordingly, communities are willing to accommodate new construction at any cost, which sometimes equates to a very relaxed development process. Many communities do not have a design guidebook, to encourage developers to be sensitive to architectural styles. While 39 of 57 (68%) communities have a zoning ordinance that separates uses in each district, only one community has a code that incorporates neo-traditional development concepts, such as compact development, mixed uses and easy walking distances.

Several communities within the region have an excessive amount of substandard housing. Few communities in the region have a housing strategy or plan, so solutions to housing problems are often knee-jerk or haphazard with little regard to long-term needs. The region lacks affordable housing options, particularly for those with low to moderate incomes and those that have special needs. Homeownership opportunities are often missed due to the poor credit of potential buyers. Many Southwest Georgia families report choosing manufactured housing due to its affordability and flexible financing options. New residents to the region must sometimes settle in a neighboring county from their place of employment because of limited housing choices. Transportation options are few and cars and bicycles are still a means of transportation for many, but there are few bicycle lanes. The complete streets options should be aggressively pursued as growth occurs. Infrastructure improvements are difficult for most communities due to the lack of revenue from services. Grants from state and federal sources and taxes finance most improvements.

Local leaders should look for ways to partner with surrounding communities and developing capital improvements plans in order to cover the cost of future repair and expansion.



Issues & Opportunities

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Regional Assessment is a review of potential issues and opportunities within the region. These identified issues and opportunities, however, may be modified through additional analysis, particularly in the next phase of the Regional Plan, the Regional Agenda. The final list of identified concerns should form the blueprint for what needs to be addressed in the plan.

Strengths

Low cost of living
Great place to do business
Natural and Cultural Resources
Flint River
Agriculture
Prime Farmland
Access to industrial airport
Lake Seminole

Water Supply
Available Land
Low crime rate in some communities
School (colleges, universities)
Consolidation of schools
Peanut Production
Proximity to Alabama and Florida

The official state crop of Georgia is the peanut. Bringing in revenues over \$2.0 Billion and over 25% of those revenues are from peanut production in Southwest Georgia. Decatur, Early, Mitchell, Miller, Worth, Baker, Seminole, and Calhoun counties are among the top ten peanut producing counties in the state. Source: gapeanuts.com/gapnutstatefactsheet

Weaknesses

Transportation Network
Unpaved Roads
Lack of Recreation
Concentrations of dilapidated housing
Landfill (Some are about to reach capacity)
Lack of Animal Control
Population decreasing in some communities
Lack of jobs

Lack of affordable housing
Need for rental housing
Infrastructure Deficiencies (Streets, Water, Sewer, Bridges)
Lack of a skilled trained workforce
Saturation of new housing for sale in some counties
Lack of funding/tax base for project
Digital Infrastructure
Dropout rate

Opportunities

Consolidation of governments
Solar Panels
New business creation
Attract and support youth
Intergovernmental Coordination
Agritourism
Lack of Amenities
Attract Retirees

Lake Seminole
Flint River
Emergency Services
Better use of airport
Food processing & Manufacturing
Rapid population growth in some counties
Intergovernmental Coordination
Downtown Development & Revitalization

Threats

Crime and violence
Shrinking tax base
High Poverty Rates
Lack of zoning in some counties
Business Closures
Politics
Housing Foreclosures
Rapid population growth in some counties
Encroachment in some areas due to development
Decreasing natural resources



HOUSING



Housing affordability and housing options are issues that all communities in the region face. Housing affordability measures whether or not a typical family earns enough income to purchase a home. When housing is not affordable, individuals and families are not able to increase their income and have upward social mobility. Typically homes that pay more than 30% for their income for their mortgage are considered unaffordable. Those that are not able to afford a mortgage are renters, living in overcrowded situations or homeless. Region 10 has all these issues and barriers to housing and housing affordability. Homelessness is a problem that is surfacing more and more based on the economy. Most communities would like all residents to have more affordable housing options. Housing has a direct relationship on a sustainable economy. It is the economic linchpin of communities. When there is an imbalance between jobs and employment opportunities, people will invariably go to where the jobs are. Over the past decade, incomes for residents in Region 10 have not grown significantly, but housing costs have grown a lot. Most low-income households spend more of their income on mortgage or rent. A study conducted by the National Low Income Housing Coalition stated that in our region in order to afford a two-bedroom apartment, renters need to earn a minimum of \$12.40 per hour. This is hardly the case in Region 10. Housing costs and rents are generally lower in rural communities; however, lower incomes and higher poverty rates make housing options simply unaffordable for many rural residents.



Rural low-income families are often limited to poor quality housing.

Homes in the region that are available are often in need of extensive repair or improvements to just meet basic health and safety levels. Rural homes are more likely to be in substandard conditions. In addition to income, the lack of access to credit severely limits options for decent, clean and affordable rural housing. Even in communities that do have a bank presence, low income rural families still struggle to access affordable mortgages. There



are many communities in the region that are growing (Albany, Moultrie, Thomasville, Sylvester), some at a faster pace than others (Lee).

Many housing programs are geared toward home ownership instead of rental housing, so neighborhoods with an ample supply of rental housing (subsidized and unsubsidized) have few resources for maintenance. Several communities have agencies that provide housing assistance to low income residents through subsidized programs and housing choice vouchers. These programs are income based and provide limited assistance to families in the region.

With half of the region's housing stock older than most residents, code enforcement and code compliance are essential to maintain the quality of housing stock. Most of the region's housing stock was construction prior to the 1930's. Local leaders should educate residents on programs through United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) and other resources to help maintain their homes.

Preserving the affordable housing stock involves using local, state and federal programs and working with nonprofits to employ creative financing and ownership structures that preserve affordable rental housing in both the public and private stock.

Historic Preservation is a tool that can be used to preserve affordable housing and commercial sites. There also needs to be increased public investments for the preservation and retrofitting of existing affordable rental housing. Preserving existing affordable housing has a variety of economic and social benefits and is typically more efficient than building new units.

Rehabilitation including energy-efficient upgrades is a huge issue throughout the region and several communities have benefited from rehabilitation efforts through the Community Home Investment Program (CHIP), the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and USDA's 504 Program to assist those eligible low income residents and families.

TRANSPORTATION



As Georgia and the nation continue to recover from the economic slump, commercial and industrial development is recovering also. Industrial development brings jobs and transportation is a huge part of the overall development. Commercial and retail development requires access to local roads and transit. Transportation in rural communities experience a set of unique circumstances. Since economically the region lags behind the state, the cost of transportation primarily falls on local communities with decreasing populations and decreasing tax base. These mitigating factors makes proper planning for the current and existing transportation needs extremely important. The state of Georgia's Local Maintenance and Improvement Grant (LMIG) funding has seen a dramatic decrease in recent years and all communities are struggling with how to finance the improvements.

Regionally, the transportation systems and highways are sufficient for the need but in order to attract new and growing businesses, we must be able to assure prospective businesses that we can accommodate their transportation needs. Whether it be ensuring that workers can get to work on time or whether goods and other products can reach their destinations or that people and cargo can reach cities easily in a safe, reliable way. Leaders in Region 10 must focus on transportation to build the future. In 2015, House Bill (HB) 170 that allowed regions to implement the Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Taxes), subject to voter approval, to fund transportation improvements. In 2012 the regional transportation sales tax failed miserably and was not



supported by voters. The Transportation Investment Act (TIA) was passed in three regions in Georgia and since 2012 more than \$424 million dollars has been raised collectively by a 1% sales tax in those three regions. The prospects of the passage of a similar measure remain unclear.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES



Community Facilities serve the population at large and provide essential services to residents. Facilities must be analyzed for their effect on land use as well as effect on services provided by these facilities. Regional needs are always considered in planning for health care, fire and police protection and other community needs.

The Region has several issues facing them from aging infrastructure to limited recreational and community facilities. In addition to these issues there is also a lack of capital to fund these facilities. The stagnant and slow growing population prevents any easy solutions to these challenges. These issues also impact development in many communities and drives where development will occur. This is one of the reasons the communities with small populations do not experience the level of development that larger communities experience; however if they are able to find their niche, development can and will occur. Colquitt, Georgia (Miller County) is a great example of this. Most communities utilize grants and loans to address these ongoing maintenance issues. Thirty-seven of the forty-four cities in our region provide water and/or sewer to residents. More than half provide both water and sewer.

Southwest Georgia has an abundance of high quality groundwater due to the Floridian Aquifer. Though water in our region is abundant, it is not an unlimited resource. The population growth and economic development in some parts of Georgia and the changing agricultural practices and recent droughts have led Georgia

farmers to depend more heavily on irrigation to keep crops healthy. The region and state have unique challenges in addressing further water supply needs.



In the north most populous part of the state, groundwater cannot reliably supply the amount of water needed for cities and large industrial operations. The Floridian aquifer is one of the most productive aquifers in the world, and those who live above it depend on it heavily to meet their water needs. Additionally, extensive reliance on the aquifer for irrigation during drought conditions, because of the significant connection between groundwater and surface water in southwest Georgia, contributed to reduced stream flow in the Chattahoochee and Flint River basins. The Environmental Protection Division (EPD) placed a moratorium on new agricultural withdrawal permits from the Floridian aquifer in southwest Georgia and on all agricultural surface water withdrawal permits of the entire Flint River Basin.

Health Care

The health care needs of the region are primarily taken care of by two regional hospitals: Archbold and Phoebe Putney Memorial. Archbold Medical Center is a four-hospital, three nursing-home health system with 540 patient bed facility. Archbold Memorial Hospital is a 264-bed hospital located in Thomasville, Georgia. The system also includes hospitals in Grady and Mitchell Counties and one other location outside of the region.

Phoebe Putney Health System is a not-for-profit hospital that provides services to residents in all counties in Region 10. The main hospital is located in Albany, Georgia and also included are locations in Worth County and one other community outside the region. They provide primary, urgent and emergency care in several locations throughout the region in addition to providing an array of specialty services.

Fire & Police Protection

The ability of a community to provide fire protection and police protection services are vital to security of residents and impact growth and development. Residents must feel safe and protected or they will live where better services are offered.

Fire Departments receive an overall score up to a maximum of 10 points based on how well the fire department receives and dispatches fire alarms. An independent company rates City and County Fire Stations. This company is ISO or Insurance Services Office.

This is one of the tools homeowner insurance companies use to determine how much you will pay for homeowner insurance. Some of the factors used when ISO rates a city or County Fire Station are:

- Number of fire trucks
- Amount of water the fire trucks can carry to the scene of the fire.
- Amount of water the fire trucks can pump per minute.
- Number of firemen that is employed by the City or State is also a factor.



Basically, ISO is looking at the response time and how much man power and equipment is available to put out the fire upon arrival. Unfortunately, the fire Department does not allocate resources based on proposed or projected developments, but continually evaluates the need for changes in person-

nel, equipment or locations of fire stations and makes any adjustment necessary.

All of our cities and counties have some form of police protection by the police or sheriff's department. Policing in small rural communities can be challenging. Providing protection within city limits as opposed to in the counties is referring to how many people are concentrated and where they are located. In a small town with a police force or sheriff's department of only a few people, each officer will likely have to know how to do several jobs to be able to fill in for their colleagues as needed.

Police and Sheriff Department are facing and struggling with the same problems from year to year. Most people would agree that right now law enforcement officials struggle with breaking down barriers within neighborhoods to create community partnerships. This can go a long way to strengthen the protection services and actively engage the community so that community-oriented services, and trust and transparency are priorities for the department. The sharing of these services allows communities both large and small to provide adequate protection to its citizens.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION



Intergovernmental coordination is the cooperative efforts of governments at different levels and yet moving in the similar directions. What would normally be a very straightforward process is often hampered by the desire of one level of government or another to control the process. Growth management in its noblest forms attempts to combine the two governments into one to achieve more integrated services. This process must not forfeit a sense of local responsibility and overall quality of the provision of services. Improved coordination could result in tremendous cost savings for residents and governments alike. The discussion has taken place in some communities but has gone no further than a discussion due to some of the reasons mentioned above. Community leaders should take a hard look at the coordination of governments when conducting their comprehensive plan and reviewing the Service Delivery Strategy (SDS) to ensure there are not conflicts or duplication of services.

Communication is the pivotal piece that is needed to move this process forward. Some communities do this better than others and those that do reap the benefits of improved services and dollars saved. More coordination is needed between local governments and agency groups and nonprofits, especially when applying for grants and providing services. Nonprofits and faith based organizations provide essential services but many times their efforts need to be in cooperation and coordination with local governments. Strong communities are a result of these entities working together. They are critical components of the social and governmental

structure. Consequently governments and nonprofit sectors must assertively respond to communities by rethinking existing policies to promote outreach and broad-based community and political support.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Economic Development can mean a lot of different things. It can just refer to any growth in the economy as a whole. But more generally, economic development creates conditions for economic growth that expands the capacity of individuals and communities to maximize the use of their talents and skills to improve the quality of life for them and their communities. Generally, as communities become more economically developed, the well-being of its citizens improve in lots of ways: their health, education security, freedom, and self-sufficiency.

In this section we will discuss elements in our region that have the greatest impact on Economic Development: population, environment, housing, education. Southwest Georgia is a rural region with the exception of Albany and the economy is dependent to some extent on agriculture. Agriculture and farming have changed over the years and agriculture is becoming heavily dependent on federal funding. What we see today are not the family farms, but huge farming operations that are very costly to operate.

Albany Georgia is located in Dougherty County and is a commercial hub in Georgia with industries and vibrant cultural and recreational amenities offered. Approximately, 25% of the population reside in Dougherty County, but Thomasville, Moultrie, Bainbridge and Cairo are growing and increasing in size forming smaller commercial centers for the region.





Solar Farms are becoming very popular and are a source of economic development. Decatur County has a 168 acre site and Terrell County also has solar farm sites. Recently, the Marine Corps Logistic Base in Albany/ Dougherty County had a groundbreaking for a solar power facility. Reportedly, Georgia Power will build, own, operate and maintain the solar facility at MCLB-Albany, using the facility to generate electricity for the utility's electric grid. The 150-acre facility will have 138,000 fixed panels that could power up to 5,000 homes. The project is estimated to represent a \$75 million investment.



Our region has lots of historic and cultural attractions as well as an abundant supply of ground water, large land parcels, access to rail and road network, clean air and competitive utility rates that make it attractive to those businesses seeking to locate, relocate or expand. The region also has an inland port in Bainbridge (Decatur County) and several municipal airports available to serve transportation needs.

LAND USE



Humans use land for lots of different things. Land use might not seem like the most exciting topic, but it is important. Governments make many decisions for land and how the land will be used. Land use is the function or functions that humans apply to the land available to them and involves the management of natural and built environment. The landscape of our region is an interweaving of commercial, agricultural, residential land uses reflecting the history and culture of the region. Zoning is related to land use but is how governments regulate and control land use. Communities try to predict the future of land use and plan and prepare for positive and negative impacts. Mapping current land uses creates a document that shows exactly where patterns of development are occurring, which can be used to determine where new homes, business or community facilities should be located.



NATURAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES



Our region has an abundance of natural resources including prime farmland, forested areas and an abundance of water (surface and groundwater), wetlands and rare animals and plants. There are also recreational and historic sites throughout the region. Whether you are looking for a fun family event at the Flint RiverQuarium or step back in time at Swamp Gravy, you will find it in our region. Natural and cultural resources improve the quality of life and create opportunities that promote economic development, stimulate learning and preserve the region's history. Cultural Resources include the arts and the historic culture. It is the physical evidence of past human activity and can take various forms. How both are managed affects the quality of life for both present and future generations. It is inherent upon us all to move forward in the future while preserving and respecting our past.



POPULATION

The human population is always changing either increasing or declining. Communities intentionally work to manage the rate of growth or decline of the population. In addition, the population needs must be determined and assessed. The Southwest Georgia Region encompasses 14 counties (Baker, Calhoun, Colquitt, Decatur, Dougherty, Early, Grady, Lee, Miller, Mitchell, Seminole, Terrell, Thomas and Worth). The region covers 5,916 square miles, and had a population of 352,101 at the 2010 Census. The population is projected to continue to increase.

Population changes whether increases or decreases impact services in all communities. Demographic changes also determine what services should be provided. This element is examined and presented to determine why and how the region's population is changing.





Regional Development & Patterns

Understanding regional development patterns and how these changes impact future trends in land use and development is critical for sustainable growth and development. Since our region is primarily rural and agricultural it is important to balance these patterns with development. The projected development patterns are based on information from the comprehensive plans in addition to local regulations that have been adopted. This information is important to regional planners, local governments, developers and other decisions makers to regulate land use in an efficient and ethical way and prevent land-use conflicts. Local leaders more importantly use development patterns to plan for the needs of communities while protecting and safeguarding natural resources and habitats. Land use options are one element of the comprehensive plan that provides a vision for the future possibilities of development in cities and counties. Regional planning takes local information and presents a regional picture.

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Projected Development Patterns

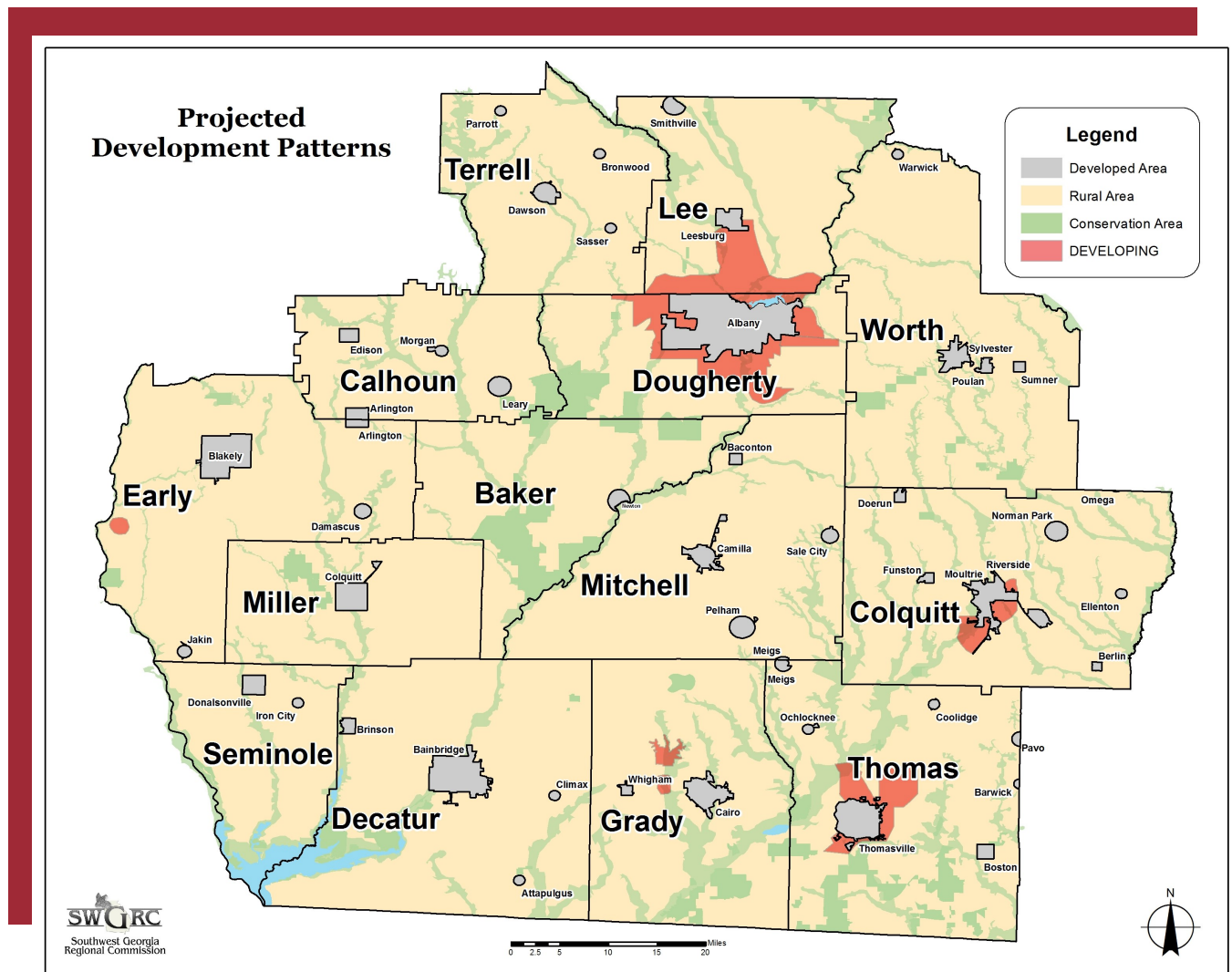
The following are the projected development patterns in Southwest Georgia for the 20 year planning period in the categories below:

Conservation: Areas to be preserved in order to protect important resources or environmentally sensitive areas of the region. Areas shown as conservation must correspond to the Regionally Important Resource Map.

Rural: Areas designated on the projected development map are not expected to become urbanized or require provision of urban services during the planning period.

Developed: Areas classified as “developed” exhibit urban development patterns where municipal services are already being provided. All cities in the region are classed as “developed” whether they are built out or not.

Developing: Areas that have experienced recent development and development pressure that will likely continue, particularly as the economy begins to improve. These areas either currently have or will require the provision of urban services during the planning period. Some of the areas indicated in this category have not significantly developed; however, they have been identified as having a high probability of becoming developed in the planning period.



The following are Developing Areas within Southwest Georgia:

Grady County area along the Florida border that include parts of Decatur, Grady and Thomas Counties have felt the pressure of development from Leon, Gadsden and Jefferson Counties in Florida. Many residents that live within a reasonable distance commute from these border counties in Georgia to Tallahassee. They enjoy a lower cost of living while enjoying the amenities of an urban area. The Beatchon area in southern Grady County has been developing rapidly for nearly 20 years. Grady County is developing the Tired Creek Area, a recreational project that is set to expand and enhance economic development. Thomas and Decatur County has also seen development along the periphery.

Areas in Dougherty County and Albany are continuing to develop, particularly the Dawson Road area in north Albany and the downtown area of Albany. Several new businesses are opening and others are set to open.



Areas of North Mitchell County and pockets of Camilla along Highway 19 are developing due to development in North Mitchell County with the

addition of a North Mitchell County School and the Baconton Charter School. The City of Baconton is also experiencing a small amount of growth as well.



Moultrie, the county seat of Colquitt County both are both experiencing rapid expansion and growth. The leadership answered the call from developers and growth and expansion is taking place in the Industrial Park and numerous businesses and significant residential development is occurring.



Leesburg and Lee County south of Highway 32, this area has developed and continues to develop both residentially and commercially. The popu-

lation experienced more growth than any county in the region according to the last Census. New comers are moving in and Dougherty County residents are migrating. Lee County school system is experiencing sustained success and is an economic draw for many moving and relocating to the area.

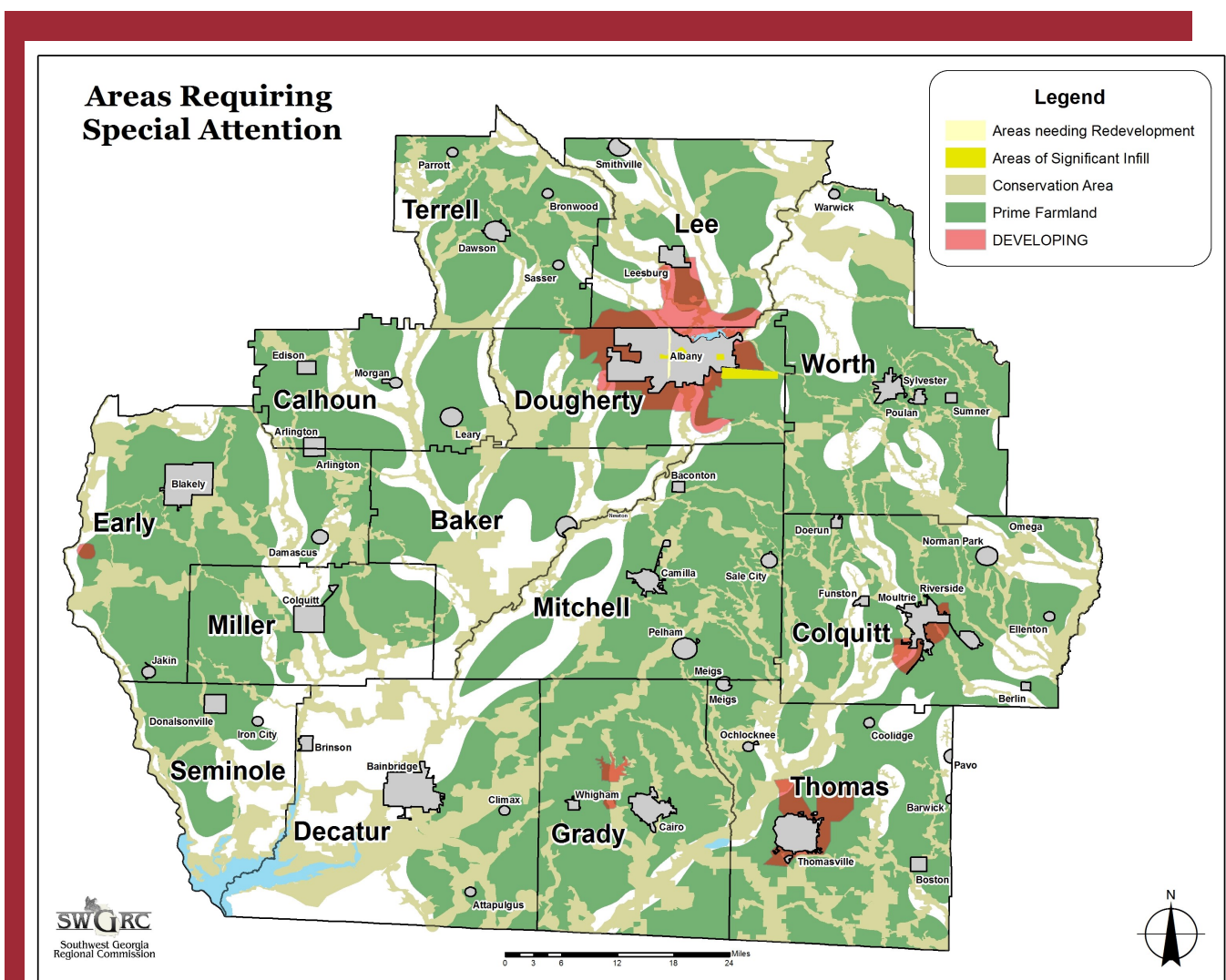
Lake Seminole and the Flint River are two of the greatest natural resources in our region. The areas in Bainbridge, Seminole and Decatur County brings residents and recreation to the area since the areas are within short distances from Florida and Alabama



A strip along Highway 84 east of Bainbridge has experienced development due to the newly constructed Decatur County High School. This area has been expanding commercially due to the City annexing a portion of Highway 84. Decatur County like several other border counties is experience pressure from Florida.

Areas Requiring Special Attention

The Areas Requiring Special Attention section evaluates the land use trends of the region and how they may impact sensitive areas. The sensitive areas were derived primarily from the Regionally Important Resource map. Areas requiring special attention are primarily those areas where the two maps overlap and projected development could have a significant impact on these Regionally Important Resources. This section will examine the categories identified as areas requiring special attention.



Areas where significant natural and cultural resources are likely to be impacted by development

Areas adjacent to Lake Seminole and Flint River

The Red Hills region I Decatur, Grady and Thomas Counties

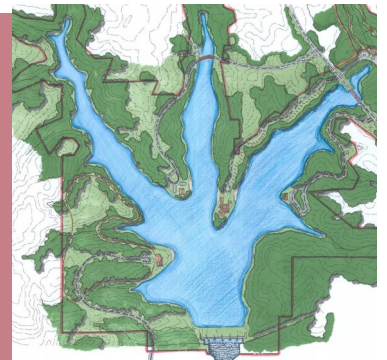
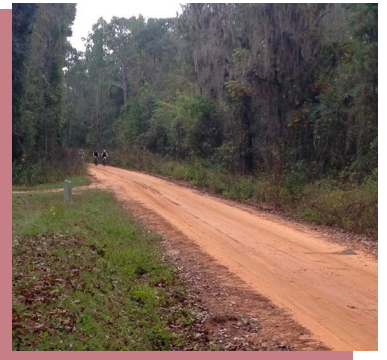
Tired Creek a 960 area public fishing lake on Tired Creek is well underway despite public criticism from state, federal and other stakeholders. The lake will impact more than 300 acres of wetlands and nine miles of streams and will alter flow on the Ochlocknee River for property owners and communities in Grady County and Florida.

Areas where rapid development or change of lands uses is likely to occur, especially where the pace of development has or may outpace the availability of community facilities and services, including transportation

Areas around Lake Seminole in Seminole and Decatur Counties are treasured natural resources and are desirable because of their natural beauty, location and proximity to Bainbridge, Tallahassee and Alabama.

Areas in Thomas County on the periphery of north Thomasville. Several areas have already been identified and are waiting development. This area is marketed to Seniors and retirees as a lower cost option to retiring in Florida. Thomasville was named as one of the top cities in Georgia to retire.

The Tired Creek Project a 960 acre recreational fishing lake in Grady County is expected to be completed this year and will become a rapidly developing area. This project has been under way since the 1930's and multiple plans have been proposed for a park and lake on Tired Creek. Grady County officials are moving forward and the project is reportedly on track and at or below budget.



The New Hilton development in Early County was planned as a complete village appealing to families and retirees that would connect Dothan and Albany and would be the only town in Early County positioned along the Chattahoochee. This was an initiative of Early County 2055, which no longer exists.



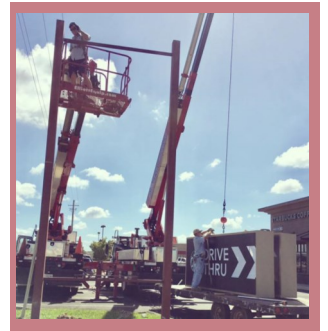
The unincorporated town and area surrounding Metcalfe, a historic farming community settled in 1887 and located eight miles southeast of Thomasville, Georgia. Currently, the Metcalfe Heritage Society is working with Thomasville Landmarks to preserve and restore the community.



The areas adjacent to Moultrie have seen development pressure in the past and development pressures are expected to continue. It is likely the city will continue to feel pressure to annex areas into the city limits as growth continues to occur. Veterans Parkway is a four lane highway that runs along the eastern edge of Moultrie in a North/South direction. This corridor is experiencing major development with a hodge podge of land uses. This area is expected to develop rapidly and would be commercially advantageous because of the large amount of traffic passing through the area.



Areas in North Mitchell County will continue to face development pressures (residential and commercial) due to the addition of two schools (North Mitchell and Baconton Charter.



An area of potential commercial development extending from Bainbridge east along Highway 84 Bainbridge has annexed the strip of highway frontage between Bainbridge and the newly constructed high school along Highway 84 east of Bainbridge.



Areas in need of redevelopment and/or significant improvements to aesthetics or attractiveness (including strip commercial corridors)

In Albany/Dougherty County extensive commercial strip development is found along major transportation corridors such as Slappey Boulevard, Oglethorpe Boulevard, Dawson Road, Newton Road and Sylvester Highway. Development along Slappey and Oglethorpe is largely “built out” and is beginning to encroach down side streets and into established residential areas. This type development can also be found along Gillionville Road.

In Moultrie/Colquitt County development rapid development is occurring on Veterans Parkway and strip development can be seen. There is developed and undeveloped land on both sides of Veterans Parkway Corridor. A development plan for the entire parkway would be recommended and smart growth strategies pursued along the corridor to mandate consistency for streetscaping, buffers and setbacks.

Areas with significant infill development opportunities, including scattered vacant sites, large abandoned structures, or sties that may be environmentally contaminated

Downtown Albany is the largest downtown in the region and was once a vibrant center of economic development and tourism. It has steadily declined but recently the City has made attempts to improve the areas with the reuse of existing buildings and infill development. The City is working to encourage more development in downtown so that the revenue from the Tax Allocation District (TAD), Opportunity/Military/HUB Zones can other incentives and be fully realized.

The Marine Corps Logistics Base in Dougherty County is expanding even though bases are closing, for now MCLB is safe and from all reports is growing and expanding. With more than 5,000 employees, of which about 3,300 are civilian workers, community leaders are always working to strengthen the base. Expansion would mean an increase in the number of employees and facilities and a corresponding increase in housing, goods and services throughout the area.

East Albany has been has been characterized by high crime, substandard housing and significant disinvestment for nearly 20 years. This area is included in several revitalizations plans developed by the City. The addition of a Walmart in East Albany was welcomed but there have been several unsuccessful housing developments that have stalled (Enclave at Oglethorpe, University Gardens) due to financial problems.

Areas of significant disinvestment, levels of poverty, and/or unemployment sustainability higher than average levels for the region as a whole

Areas of significant disinvestment are characterized by high rates of unemployment and vacant sites and significant infill opportunities. Southwest Georgia is characterized and documented by poverty and high rates of poverty. These areas are found in every county in the region and are not concentrated in any particular area. Lee County is the only county in the region that does not fit this description and has experienced significant growth. According to the statistics and several studies most counties in the region with the exception of Lee area described as “persistent poverty,” where at least 20% of the population has been below the poverty thresholds for four decades, as measured by the last four consecutive decennial Censuses.



Southwest Georgia's Quality Community Objectives (QCOs)

To help determine how consistent Southwest Georgia's development is with the Department's Quality Community Objectives (QCOs), governments in the region were asked to evaluate themselves with the help of the Quality Growth Assessment Tool. The Quality Community Objectives consider the development patterns and options that will help Georgia preserve its unique cultural, natural and historic resources and provide an overall view of a community's policies. Combined with the insights of Regional Commission staff, this section will assess how well Southwest Georgia is developing sustainable and livable communities.

Traditional Neighborhoods

Traditional Neighborhoods development patterns should be encouraged, including use of more human scale development, mixing of uses within easy walking distance of one another, and facilitating pedestrian activity. Traditional neighborhoods are characterized by village-style development that



includes a variety of housing types, a mixture of land uses and active center, walkable design and often a transit option within compact neighborhood areas. These neighborhoods should have well connected street and blocks and a variety of public spaces, with amenities such as stores, schools and churches within walking distances of residences. Traditional neighborhoods create communities designed for life, work and play. Many of our

communities in the region are a reflection of this type neighborhood. In order to achieve and maintain this design community would need to require these elements to be included in new construction and into areas that can best accommodate this type of development.



Infill Development

Communities should maximize the use of existing infrastructure and minimizes the conversion of undeveloped land at the urban periphery by encouraging development or redevelopment of sties closer to the downtown or traditional urban core of the community. Communities

across the region area recognize that the spread of patterns of growth or sprawl that have shaped a lot of communities, cannot be maintained. Transportation, public facilities and increased infrastructure costs are just some of the issued communities are faced with. Many times developable areas have been passed-over and existing public facilities ignored for the sake of "development". Cost and reduced land supply has increased interest in infill development opportunities. Infill development is the process of developing vacant or under-used parcels within existing neighborhoods that are already largely developed. Most of the communities and neighborhoods in the region have utilized this option of development since there are a large number of homes built on smaller lots. This occurs primarily on land within the city limits. Successful infill development is characterized by overall residential densities high enough to support improved services and amenities. It can return cultural, social recreational and entertainment opportunities,



gathering places and vitality to older centers and neighborhoods. It requires a collaborative partnership between government, the development community, financial institutions, and other resources necessary for this type of development to be successful. Community Ventures, a nonprofit that has successfully developed housing in Mitchell and Colquitt counties is a good example of how this is possible.



Sense of Place

Traditional downtown areas should be maintained as the focal point of the community or, for newer areas where this is not possible, the development of activity centers that serve as community focal points should be encouraged. These community focal points should be attractive, mixed use, pedestrian-friendly places where people choose to gather for shopping, dining, socializing, and entertain-

ment.

Many places in the region hold special meaning to particular people. These places are said to have a strong “sense of place” and a strong identity and character that is deeply felt by local residents and by many visitors. It is developed through knowledge and history of a particular area after visiting or residing there for a period of time. Memories of personal and cultural experiences over time make a place special; songs, dances or folk plays like “Swamp Gravy” in Colquitt, GA (Miller County) and public art in the forms of murals to liven up blank walls and convey the community’s history and heritage. There are other great examples of this in the region.

A community's uniqueness makes them different than any place else and people are more likely to live and remain there and tourists are more likely to visit. Most communities in the region have the traditional downtowns as their focal point; however many are not as vibrant as they have been in years past. Several communities in our region are Main Street communities, which offer downtowns as a destination with quaint shops and walkable streets. Downtown also offers a distinctive place that is a snapshot of the community and the people who live there. It is a place of employment, shopping, worship, housing, entertainment, government services, dining, lodging, entertainment and cultural attractions. Most communities are agricultural in nature and many are doing little to ensure farmland is protected from development and most do not have design standards that encourage developers to be sensitive to the characteristics of the region, downtown and existing architectural styles. Since development in most communities is scanty at best, any development is perceived as good and communities are fearful of discouraging developers with additional design requirements. The older buildings found in most downtowns are invaluable assets when attempting to establish a discernible place. The adoption of design guidelines and a design review process would help ensure that building alterations and enhancement are tasteful, historically appropriate and compatible with adjacent architecture. These guidelines can also serve to guide the design of new buildings to facilitate their integration into the existing downtown fabric.



Transportation Alternatives

Transportation alternatives include transportation by automobiles, including mass transit, bicycle routes and pedestrian facilities, should be made available in each community. Greater use of alternate transportation should be encouraged.

Since our region is very rural, transportation has always plagued communities. More connectivity is needed region wide. Neighborhoods do not have enough sidewalks and those that are in place in some communities are not well maintained. There is no public transportation anywhere in the region except Albany, Georgia. A general public transportation system is offered to residents in Baker, Calhoun, Colquitt, Decatur, Dougherty, Early, Grady, Lee, Miller, Mitchell, Seminole, Terrell and Worth counties. Thomas County has elected to operate its own program. Trips are provided on a demand response basis rather than fixed routes and services are provided through designated Transportation Providers in the region. Ridership is comprised mainly of clientele of social services agencies and priority is given to those participants before the general public; however public trips can be arranged through transit providers based on availability. More routes and providers are needed, but most residents still rely on transportation from friends and family in order to get around. Several of the smaller communities don't even have taxi service. Relying on others for transportation can be costly especially when those needing the services are living in poverty.

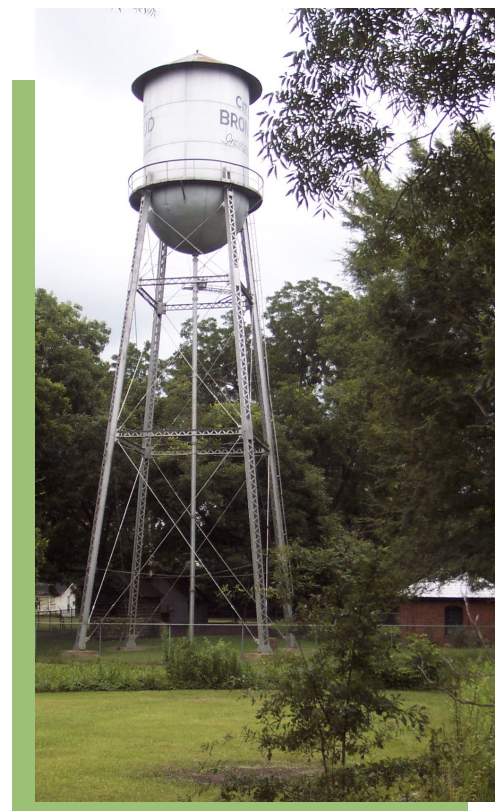
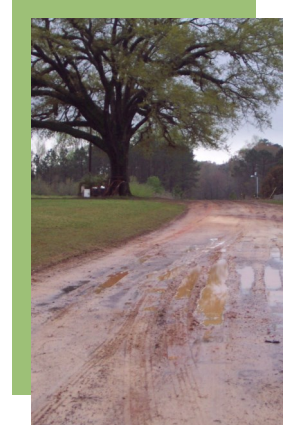
Communities have access to Transportation Alternatives funds through funds from the state and federal government to strengthen the local economy, improve the quality of life and protect the environment.

Regional Identity and Heritage Preservation

Regions should promote and preserve a regional "identity" or regional sense of place, defined in terms of traditional architecture, common economic linkages that bind the region together, or other shared characteristics. The traditional character of the community should be maintained through preserving and revitalizing historic areas of the community, encouraging new development that is compatible with the traditional features of the community, and protecting other scenic or natural feature that are important to defining the community's character.



Southwest Georgia and its 14 counties and 44 cities are unique in their own right. Every community has something that not only makes it different while at the same time links it to the region as a whole. Agriculture is key to the region and there are several thousands of acres of agricultural land in the region. Agriculture is not just farming any more. It's both farming and tourism. Today it doesn't take as many people to work on farms as it once did. Farms are larger and more diverse and being a farmer requires knowledge of advanced technology, educational and business skills. Throughout the region agriculture is dominant but along the way are sprinkles of residential and commercial. Most communities have a downtown commercial center. Buildings are older and the brick structures are one or two stories; some communities have loft apartments on the second floor. This has worked well in numerous communities. Residential includes traditional ranch style homes of all types but there are also traditional farmhouses as well as shotgun houses that speak to the region's agricultural heritage. Most of the local communities in the region have some type of festival to promote tourism such as GNAT Days in Camilla, the Peanut Festival in Sylvester and Chicken Pie Festival in Smithville. Many communities have designated historic districts and active historic preservation commissions to ensure that new development complements historic development and that the ordinances ensure this takes place.



Open Space Preservation and Environmental Protection

New development should be designed to minimize the amount of land consumed, and open space should be set aside from development for use as public parks or as greenbelts/wildlife corridors.

It is important to protect open space especially in such a rural region. There are constant development pressures to

develop land. There is minimal greenspace preservation planning taking place in the region and not enough areas set aside for greenspace preservation. Each community has tree preservation ordinances and a few use tools such as the purchase/transfer of development rights or conservation easements. A majority of communities have subdivision ordinances but most do nothing to protect open space.



Growth Preparedness

Each community should identify and put in place the prerequisites for the type of growth it seeks to achieve. These may include housing and infrastructure (roads, water, sewer and telecommunications) to support new growth, appropriate training of the workforce, ordinances to direct growth as desired, or leadership capable of responding to growth opportunities.

As communities grow, reliable data is needed to make decisions and project growth. This data is not always available especially for smaller communities. Residents feel decisions makers should do more or provide more services but many do not understand the development process. Community and civic participation is lacking in all communities unless a controversial issue is being discussed or decided. Many communities have started to educate its citizens and allow them the opportunity to serve on boards and other committees to increase their knowledge about their community. Infrastructure improvements are essential to growth and many communities lack the funding to make significant improvements without raising taxes. Several communities take advantage of funding from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and GEMA to obtain grants and loans to make improvements over time.





Regional Solutions

Regions should promote and preserve an “identity” defined in terms of traditional regional architecture, common economic linkages that bind the region together, or other shared characteristics.

The local governments in our region are always collaborating and finding common solutions to problems. The old saying that we are more alike than we are different, regardless of the size communities actually have some of the same issues. On a local level, the cities and counties are always working together or provide services such as code enforcement, fire and police protection and water and other infrastructure improvements. Many times development especially along the periphery of the county involves neighboring counties and collaborating is essential. Informational meetings and meetings of city and county officials are held quarterly at the Regional Commission to compare notes on common issues and identify regional solutions. Joint planning is needed for rural commercial areas. These and other issues are discussed during these monthly meetings which are likely to continue since they yield positive results.



Educational Opportunities

Educational and training opportunities should be readily available in each community – to permit community residents to improve their jobs skills, adapt to technological advances, or to pursue entrepreneurial ambitions.

The Southwest Georgia region has a number of options for higher education. The merger of Albany State University and Darton College is expected to increase those opportunities. In addition, the region has Bainbridge College, Southern Regional Technical College and Thomas University and several satellite branches in the region.

LaGrange College and Troy State University have satellite campuses in Albany that offers Bachelors and graduate degrees.

The region is working hard to retain students once they graduate and this cannot be done without job opportunities in the region.





Appropriate Business Employment Options

The businesses and industries encouraged to develop or expand in a community should be suitable for the community in terms of job skills required, linkages to the economic activities in the community, impact on the resources of the area, and future prospects for expansion and creation of higher-skill job opportunities.

The region's economic development organizations work hard to recruit businesses that are compatible with the region and can survive. Most communities see small business develop at a faster rate than large businesses. The small business administration provides supportive services. The workforce is the region lacks the training to recruit larger businesses, but with the advent of the career academies and quick start programs and dual enrollment colleges and universities are providing, the gap is shrinking.

Over 95% of the communities in the region agree that job diversification is needed regionally to provide long term sustainability. When businesses close it not only hurts the individual community it affects the entire region and it takes months and sometimes even years for communities and the region to recover. Since manufacturing was a significant part of our employment history, globalization of manufacturing has had a negative impact on the region since jobs are being filled overseas.



Housing Opportunities Objectives

Quality housing and a range of housing size, cost, and density should be provided in each community, to make it possible for all who work in the community to also live in the community.

Housing quality and housing choice are two issues that are pivotal when it comes to affordable housing. Small cities and rural areas are challenged to provide a variety of housing options for all citizens (seniors, young professionals, service workers). Several communities are utilizing programs through the Georgia Department of Community Affairs to address the quality of existing housing and others are working aggressively to encourage compliance to current building codes. They are also enforcing the codes when compliance is not feasible or successful. In order to make real strides in housing, it must be a priority. There are four communities that are participating in the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) or are GICH alumni. These communities along with a few others have developed a housing plan or strategy that identifies housing problems and has developed an action plan. Housing choices in the region are few and the region lacks enough affordable rentals for newcomers. Far too many rural families live in rental housing that is either too expensive or in substandard condition. Most renters are living in housing with at least one major affordability issue....quality or crowding issues. Many communities still lack enough affordable housing for low and moderate income individuals and families and those with special needs. The lack of affordable housing no matter the type of housing prevents individuals and households from meeting other basic needs, such as nutrition and healthcare, or saving for their future and that of their families. Residents in the region have lower incomes and higher poverty rates than the national average. Many developers in the region have been successful in creating affordable multifamily housing using the Georgia Department of Community Affairs Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC). Affordable housing units in Camilla (Southfork) and Sylvester (Paradise Estates) are examples of how the LIHTC can be used to create more affordable housing opportunities.



Employment Options Objective

A range of job types should be provided in each community to meet the diverse needs of the local workforce.

It is possible to be successful and have a successful business in in our region. No matter where you live everyone needs to work and make a living to provide for their families. This is possible in our region. Most people that live here especially entrepreneurs create their own destiny. More earning opportunities exist than you might image for small communities. Our region has jobs that center around government and public services and agriculture. Jobs in the service industry (restaurants, auto repair, and personal services) and other smaller businesses are prevalent in most communities. Most residents are fortunate enough to work where they live but others commute daily to neighboring cities for employment. Since our area has no real public transportation, most people are using their cars to get to work or carpooling with others. Albany is the regional commercial hub of activity and the source of most of the jobs in the region; however communities like Thomasville and Moultrie are growing.



development pressures and changing landscapes



Since our area is rural most people travel for most things, work and recreation. The region is losing younger people since the job opportunities are not available. Most youth leave the area in search of higher payer jobs and other careers. All of the counties in the region have lost population with the exception of Lee. Most are facing myriad challenges, ranging from job and population losses in many places to development pressures and changing landscapes in others. Access to jobs, services and transportation options are often limited. Communities have limited government service delivery and planning capacity which creates a barrier to job creation and development. Our region is a good place to do business and the inexpensive labor and great natural resources are continuing to attract businesses and motivate others to start their own business.



Data and Mapping Specifications

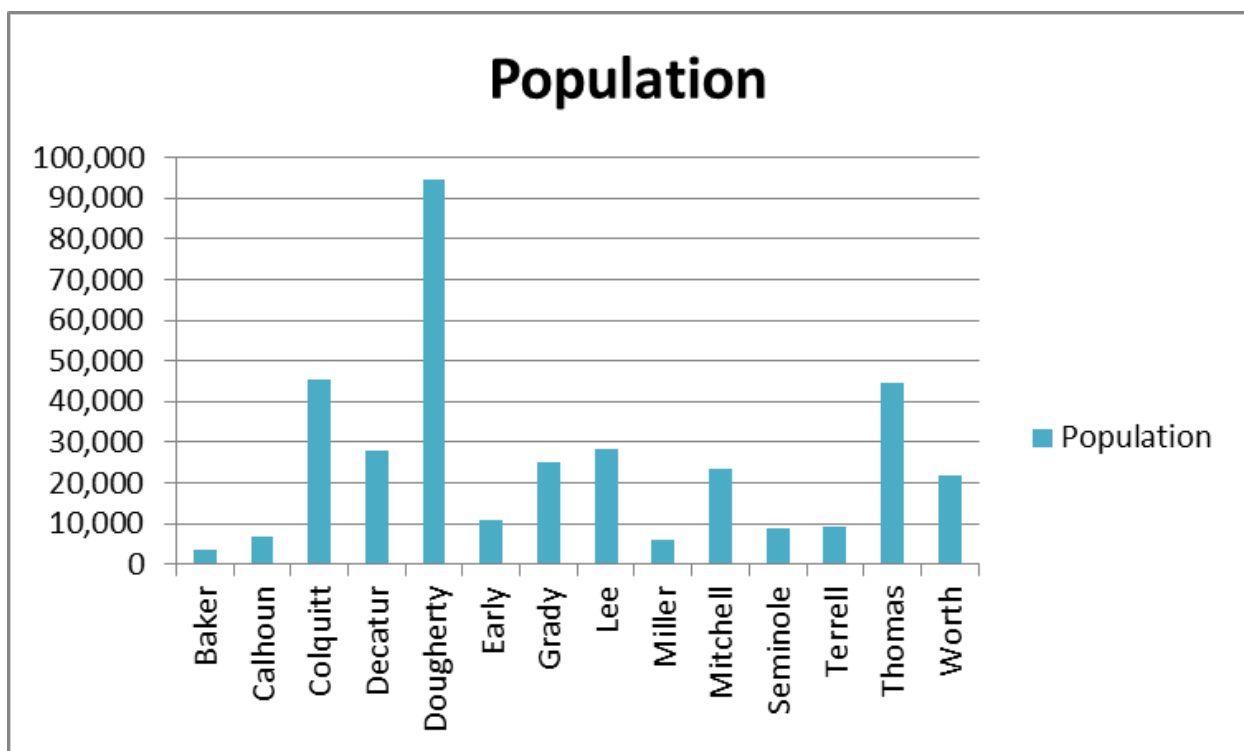
Total Population

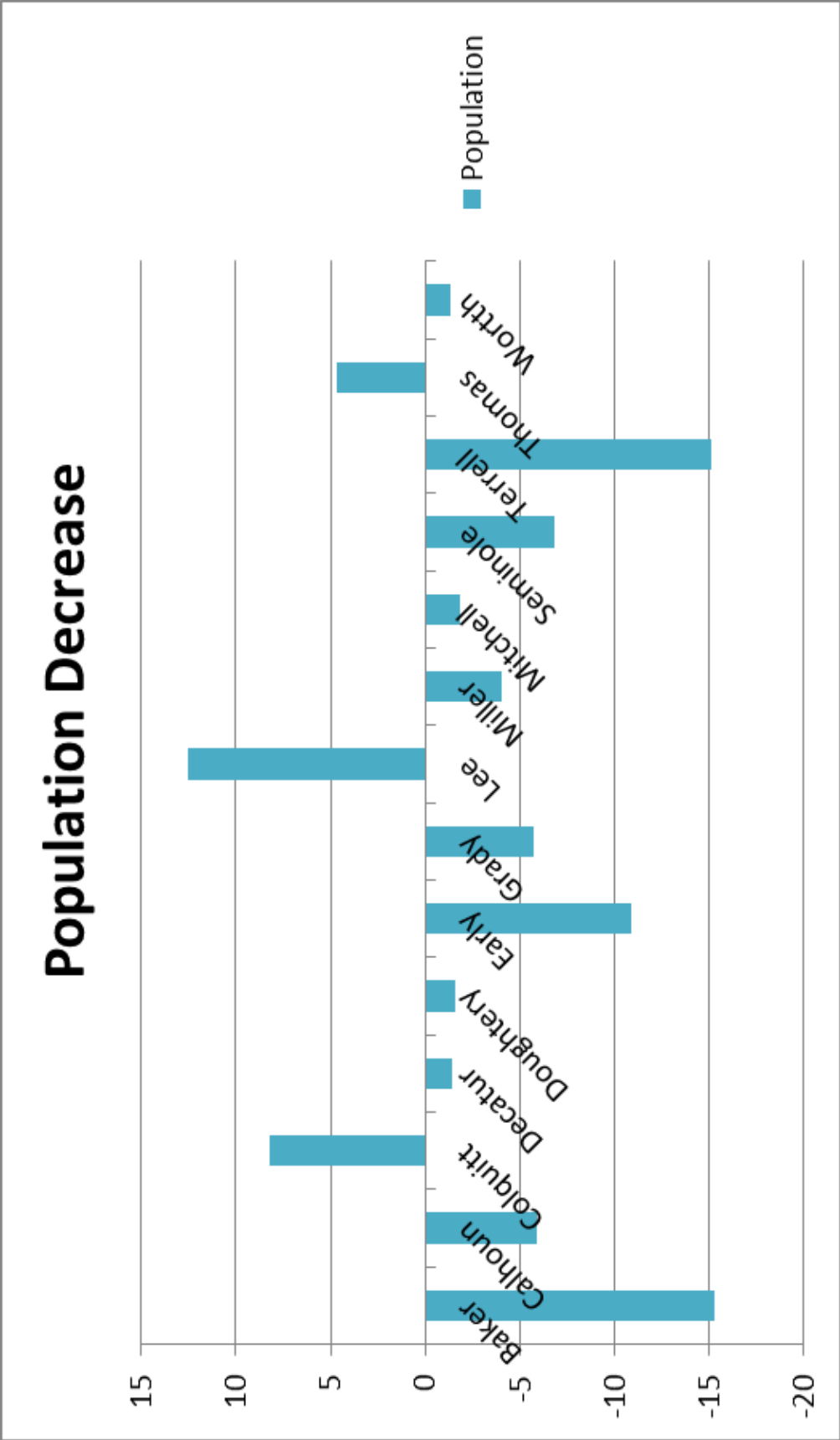
Population is one of the most important elements for any community. How the population changes affects us all. The population tell us what services we need to provide and how and who we need to provide them too. Regionally, most communities have lost population. According to estimates from the 2010 Census (Community Survey) , the Region's population ranges from high of 94,565 in Dougherty County to a low of 3,451 in Baker County.

The population for Georgia and the United States are both increasing, unlike most communities in our region with the exception of three (Lee, Colquitt, and Worth). The Hispanic population in both Georgia and the United States is increasing. Regionally the Hispanic population is growing especially in Grady, Colquitt and Decatur counties. These counties report the highest Hispanic population in the region in the two Census counts.

Almost 10% of the state of Georgia's population is Hispanic compared to nearly 2% of the United States according to the Census. As of the 2010 Census, Hispanics in Georgia made it the 10th largest state for Hispanics in the United States. Despite slowing growth rates, in the South Hispanics accounted for 46% of the population growth, according to the Pew Hispanic Research Center. Our region and our country are becoming more diverse than ever; with Asians projected to become the largest immigrant group; surpassing Hispanics. According the Center, Asians are not the only major racial or ethnic group whose numbers are rising mainly because of immigration. And while African immigrants make up a small share of the U. S. immigrant population their number are also growing steadily – roughly doubling every decade since 1970.

What does this mean for our region? The changing demographics will have an impact on housing and housing prices. Since much of the increase is from in-migration, communities will need to offer options to all age groups that are moving into their communities. The population is getting grayer as baby boomers enter their retirement years. Households are generally getting smaller, as the share of homes without children rises. The demand for rental housing is growing as well, particularly for the multifamily sector, but the aging population has increased the overall number of owner-occupied homes. In the U. S. according to Nation....about 37% of the households are renter occupied and about 63% are owner-occupied.





Age Distribution

We often hear phrases like the “forty is the new sixty” or “you’re as young as you feel”. Well with communities the ages of those living in there does matter. Rural populations are aging, due to the outmigration of youth. Most younger residents leave the region chasing jobs and opportunity. The brain drain will continue unless regions offer more opportunities on every level to youth. Youth can be a positive force for community development when provided with the knowledge and opportunities they need to thrive. In particular, young people need education and skills to contribute in a productive economy and they need access to a job market that can absorb them into its labor force.



The nation’s population is growing and with change comes increased healthcare needs. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the population 65 years and older is expected to double over the next 25 years, due to longer life spans and the larger number of baby boomers reaching retirement age. Chronic diseases such as high blood pressure and diabetes will impact the quality of life and healthcare. In Region 10 we have two major hospitals and not enough specialized medicine. In addition to these concerns older population represents 13% of the region’s population according to the 2010 Census. This number has increased, at the taking of the 2000 Census those 65 years and older represented 11% of the population. This growing population will also affect housing, transportation and other home/community-based and long term care services. Those reaching retirement age, especially the Baby Boomers are retiring with much higher wealth levels and display higher financial literacy than their predecessors.

The working population age (18 years and older) represents about 60% of the population and will provide most of the income to support the aging population, has barely increased ; in fact it has decreased from 63% (2000 Census) to 61% (2010 Census). More jobs both skilled and unskilled are needed in the region. Since the aging population for most communities in the region hovers arounds 12 to 15%; three communities are reporting higher levels. Seminole (19%), Miller (18%) and Early counties have the highest percentages of residents over the age of 65. Local leaders will need to plan for job, services and infrastructure to accommodate these age groups.



Age Distribution

County	2000			
	Under 5	Ages 5-19	18+	65 +
Baker	294	642	2961	557
Calhoun	381	1193	4925	794
Colquitt	3193	9694	30510	5405
Decatur	2164	6700	20178	3743
Dougherty	7336	22991	69489	11208
Early	876	3007	8813	1945
Grady	1663	5456	17206	3128
Lee	1807	6501	17168	1570
Miller	382	1455	4705	1092
Mitchell	1723	5543	17392	2810
Seminole	676	2040	6919	1477
Terrell	850	2626	7856	1425
Thomas	2880	9849	31136	5870
Worth	1529	5374	15683	2629
Regional	25754	83071	254941	43653

	2010			
	Under 5	Ages 5-19	18+	65 +
Baker	220	667	2120	530
Calhoun	368	1114	4577	797
Colquitt	3788	6973	27051	5863
Decatur	1867	6069	16881	3879
Dougherty	7150	21143	58774	11457
Early	717	2504	6316	1791
Grady	1890	5148	15048	3536
Lee	1865	6845	18009	2345
Miller	423	1166	3566	1123
Mitchell	1732	4769	14575	3087
Seminole	501	1725	5068	1657
Terrell	669	1891	5623	1388
Thomas	3035	9262	26843	6740
Worth	1434	4533	13202	3134
Regional	25659	73809	217653	47326

Race & Ethnicity

Americans as well as Georgians are more racially and ethnically diverse than in the past. Between 2000 and 2010, the Hispanic population has increased in all counties in the region with the exception of one (Seminole). In the remaining counties the increase has not been below 30% and in some counties it has more than doubled. This changes face the region as well as the state will bring new issues that communities will need to plan and prepare for. Overall the population for over 90% of the counties in the region decreased; with the exception of, Colquitt, Dougherty and Lee. There were increases in the African American and Hispanic populations in all counties except Dougherty. The decrease in Dougherty's Caucasian population is mainly due in large part to out migration to neighboring Lee County.

County	One Race	White	Black or African American	American Indian and Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Other race	Two or more Races	Hispanic or Latino
Baker	3409	1675	1613	9	25	2	85	42	145
Calhoun	6630	2326	4105	10	30	18	141	64	262
Colquitt	44850	29441	10210	218	294	19	4668	648	7763
Decatur	27504	15096	11438	117	144	6	703	338	1404
Dougherty	93442	27986	63470	209	736	120	921	1123	2073
Early	10924	5324	5462	39	37	2	60	84	171
Grady	24618	15716	7176	182	106	21	1417	393	2500
Lee	27911	21763	5268	74	617	19	170	387	560
Miller	6054	4266	1720	15	28	0	25	71	93
Mitchell	23267	11264	11219	77	122	10	575	231	1028
Seminole	8642	5594	2916	12	35	0	85	87	204
Terrell	9229	3407	5700	18	29	1	74	86	157
Thomas	44175	26645	16497	196	311	7	519	545	1275
Worth	21446	15232	5978	58	74	6	98	223	335
Regional	352,101	185,735	152,772	1,234	2,588	231	9,541	4,322	17,970
Georgia	9,480,164	5,787,440	2,950,435	32,151	314,467	6,799	388,872	207,489	853,689
United States	299,736,465	223,553,265	38,929,319	2,932,248	14,674,252	540,013	19,107,368	9,009,073	50,477,594

The region's average per capital income is \$17,990 which is lower than both Georgia (\$25,134) and the US average (\$27,334). Regional income levels have historically lagged behind the state and national averages, with only a small percentage showing gains.

Economic Base

2016 Job Tax Credit Tiers

Legend:

- Tier 1: 71 Counties
- Tier 2: 35 Counties
- Tier 3: 35 Counties
- Tier 4: 18 Counties

For more information on Tax Credits:
<http://www.dca.ga.gov/economic/TaxCredits/index.asp>

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

Several regional employment clusters were identified during the last update to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), including agri-business, forest, business and financial, biomedical, transportation and logistics. Medical, Agriculture and food production were the leading clusters.

Agriculture and Food Production

The region is largely agricultural based with over 80 companies involved in agribusiness, to include jobs such as farming, chemical and fertilizer production and manufacturing, vegetable, nut and animal processing, agriculture machine equipment manufacturing and repair, cotton ginning and irrigation systems.

Medical

The number of hospitals has decreased in the region with a number of hospitals closing. This had a negative impact on the health care that people in the region receive with many having to commute more than thirty miles for basic and specialized health care. Eleven of the fourteen counties have their own hospital and they are major employers in each of the counties.

County	Name of Hospital(s)
Baker County	No Hospital
Calhoun County	No Hospital
Colquitt County	Colquitt Regional Medical Center
	Turning Point Hospital
Decatur County	Memorial Hospital and Manor
Dougherty County	Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital
	Phoebe North Memorial Hospital
Early County	Pioneer Community Hospital of Early
Grady County	Grady General Hospital
Lee County	No Hospital
Miller County	Miller County Hospital
Mitchell County	Mitchell County Hospital
Seminole County	Donalsonville Hospital
Terrell County	Terrell Community Hospital
Thomas County	John D. Archbold Memorial Hospital
Worth County	Phoebe Worth Medical Hospital

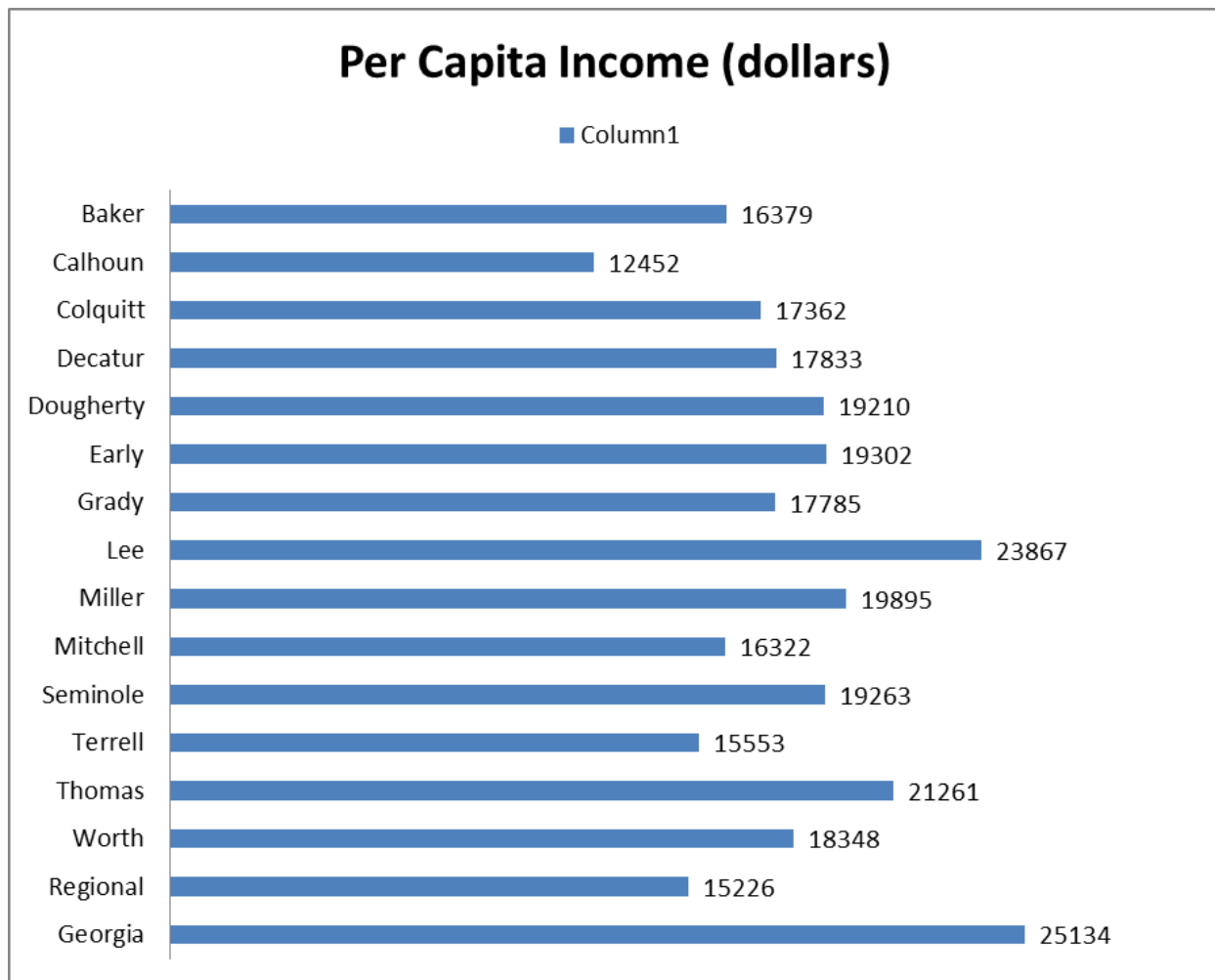
According to the Georgia Department of Labor, the industries that dominate Southwest Georgia are Construction, Education and Health Services, Financial Activities, Information, Leisure and Hospitality, Manufacturing and Agriculture, Professional and Business Services, Trade, Transportation and Utilities, and Government.

Top 5 Employment Sectors					
County	Management	Sales	Production	Manufacturing	Government
Baker	36.3	9.8	25.2	18.6	13.7
Calhoun	18.8	21.4	20.5	11.0	25.2
Colquitt	22.0	22.6	24.1	17.8	15.6
Decatur	25.7	23.7	17.4	13.6	21.5
Dougherty	28.8	23.8	17.3	11.4	21.9
Early	26.4	19.2	20.7	16.6	24.3
Grady	26.4	28.0	14.0	11.7	15.1
Lee	36.7	29.4	13.0	10.8	19.3
Miller	25.2	23.1	18.3	13.6	18.6
Mitchell	22.2	21.7	21.6	21.3	19.2
Seminole	30.0	27.0	15.6	11.9	17.0
Terrell	23.9	23.9	22.0	14.9	17.1
Thomas	33.9	25.2	14.7	12.0	21.3
Worth	25.7	22.3	17.3	11.3	21.9

Labor Force

The region's labor force in 2016 numbered 157,762 workers and the number of workers employed totaled 135,459. The number of unemployed workers totaled 2,766. The average unemployment rate in the region during 2016 was 6.4%, which was slightly higher than the state rate of 5.0% and significantly higher than the national rate of 4.9%. (Source: Georgia Department of Labor)

The average income per county in the region in 2016, as seen below, ranged from a low of \$12,452 per-capita average per year, to a high of \$25,134. The average in the region was \$34,360 compared to the state average of \$49,347, and a national average of \$51,914.



Economic Trends

The recession was particularly severe in Georgia, especially in the Atlanta region. Southwest Georgia held up somewhat better, because the growth in the region was slow and steady and the recession was not felt as strongly in the region. The region is beginning to rebound from the housing crisis and new homes are being built especially in Lee County which has experienced positive growth.

Economic Resources

A number of programs and activities are supported by the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority including low interest loans for water and sewer projects, grants, and programs to help local governments work more efficiently and with less impact to the environment.

The Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) and the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA), and the Georgia Department of Economic Development and One Georgia Authority also have various educational and assistance programs.

The Department of Community Affairs offers a number of programs, strategies and publications. The Georgia Department of Labor and the Georgia Academy for Economic Development also offer assistance programs.

Housing

An assessment of the region's housing trends yielded new information and ideas to help move the region forward. As of 2010 the total number of housing units has experience very little change over the past years with the exception of Lee County. Single family housing has felt the economic impact of the housing recession and only increased by small percentages in most counties. Manufactured/Modular housing is still quite popular in the region due to its affordability and accounts for about 20% of the housing stock according to the last Census. Some counties that had high volumes of manufactured housing (Baker, Seminole, Worth) ten years ago are experience issues with this type housing's depreciating values and reduced tax collections. In addition, some manufactured housing is aging and causing code enforcement issues. While there are several factors associated with the high percentage of manufactured homes in the region, high poverty rates and low incomes play a significant role in the growing numbers. Substandard housing is an issue in every community and programs such as Community Home Investment and Community Development Block Grant are making a difference, but the need for rehabilitation is still great.

Multi-family housing provides a greater variety of housing choices for residents. This type of housing is needed throughout the region for all income levels.

Condition and Occupancy

According to 2010 Census data, about half (52%) of the region's housing stock was built between 1980 and 1998. When you consider the large proportion of manufactured housing in the region and the fact that much of the youngest segment of the housing stock is nearly 30 years old, there appears to significant potential for rehabilitation and revitalization in the region. 61% of the housing in Southwest Georgia is owner occupied, and the remaining percentage is rented.

Vacancy rates for owner occupancy is low (fewer than 3.6%) and is comparable to state (3.5%) and national (2.5%) rates. The national and state vacancy rates for renter occupied units are 7.8% and 10.6% respectively. The regional range is 2.8%-11.5%. The least populous counties within the region have the highest vacancy rate among renters. The main cause is due to a lack quality rental property in these areas which forces potential renters to seek housing opportunities in neighboring counties.

Cost of Housing

The average value of homes in Southwest Georgia is substantially lower than both the state and national medians. Nationally, the median value for a home is \$192,400 whereas the state median value is \$163,500. 53.1% of the homes in Southwest Georgia are valued between less than \$50,000 and \$99,999. While the cost of a home is cheaper, renting a home is not. Georgia rents are higher than national rates. In Georgia, 30.4% of renters pay \$750-\$999 for rent per month. However, that is not the case with Southwest Georgia rents. 26% of renters in the U.S. pay \$500-\$749 per month rent and while Southwest Georgians are paying the same amount of rent there is a higher proportion (35.5%) of them who fall into this category.

Cost-Burdened Households

Cost burdened households devote too much of their budget to housing, rather than to other necessities, like food or health care. The chart above shows that all counties in Southwest Georgia, with the exception of Lee are lower than state and national averages however.

The average median income in the region is \$34,360. Keeping the average regional income in mind and the fact that over half of the homes in the region are valued at less than \$100,000, homeownership based strictly on the numbers appears to be affordable. What the numbers fail to consider are the household size, location of housing, credit scores, taxes, insurance and other liabilities that households incur. Other factors that impact homeownership include maintenance, necessary upgrades or repairs and additional debt.

If a household is cost burdened, it affects more than just affordability. It also determines how much income is left over to meet other needs, how stable a household's living situation is, what school and employment options are available and what must be sacrificed in order to obtain it. According to the Out of Reach Report 2016, in Georgia, the Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom apartment is \$848. In order to afford this level of rent and utilities – without paying more than 30% of income on housing, a household must earn \$2,826 monthly or \$33,908 annually based on a 40-hour work week, this translates into \$16.30 per hour. In Southwest Georgia and nationally the minimum wage is \$7.25 and this would make most households in our region cost burdened.

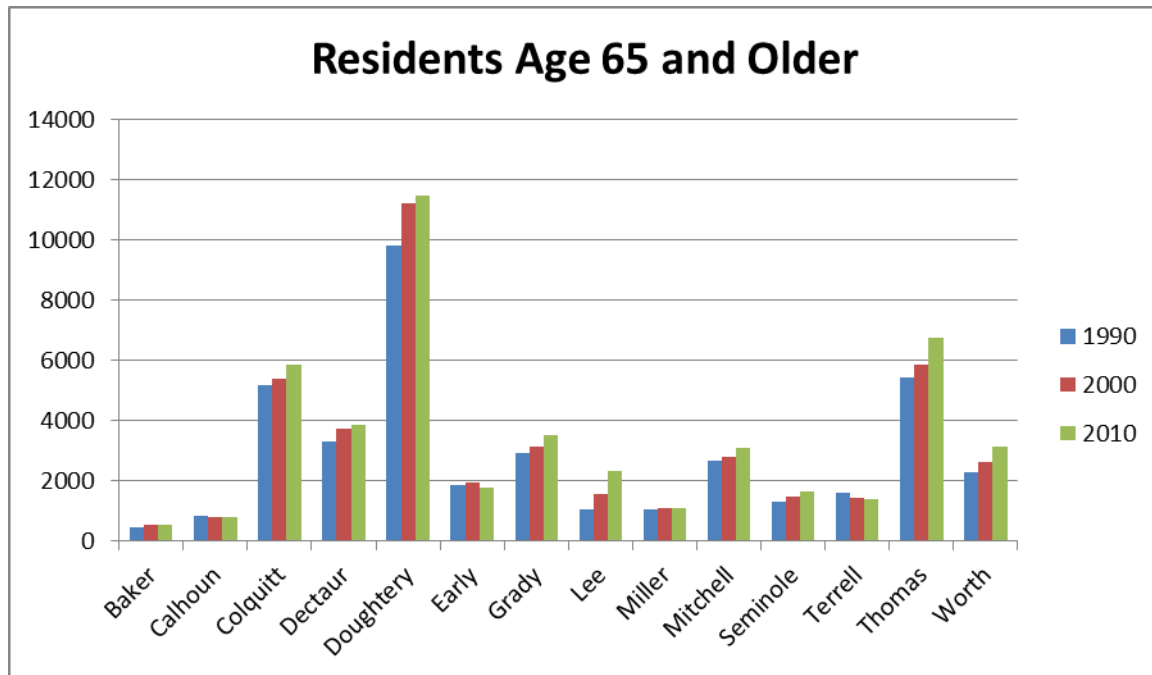
Cost burdened homes also have a correlation with other socioeconomic factors including income, income from social security or public assistance, employment status, occupations, household type, age of householder, household size, race and unit type. All these factors play into the likelihood of a home becoming cost burdened. With recent employment losses, cost burdened households will become even more prevalent.

Special Needs Housing

The senior housing industry has grown significantly nationwide since the 1990s with an increase in senior housing and continuing care communities. There is a great need for this type of housing, particularly with the “graying” of the population in Southwest Georgia. A study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration of Aging released a 2002 report that stated that by the year 2030 the older populations of the United States (defined as 65 years or older) will more than double to 70 million. Many communities in the region are aware of this change and some are preparing for it.

Regional statistics supports the national trends and also future trends. The population regionally is getting older. All counties in the region have had consistent gains in population over the past four census reporting periods. Most counties in the region have at least 10% or more seniors over the age of 65 living in their communities. Local leaders will need to accommodate this age group as well as those who are disabled and those who will become disabled as they grow older. Sidewalks, signage and other infrastructure improvement within communities should be encouraged as they connect residents with their community and improve the quality of life for all of us as we age.

Dougherty, Thomas and Mitchell have specialized housing for seniors and those with disabilities. A few communities are improving their sidewalks downtown but few are working to improve the safety, accessibility and appearance of sidewalks within neighborhoods due to funding issues. Unfortunately, most communities do not have housing for all income levels especially the elderly and those persons with disabilities and other special needs. These groups tend to have fixed incomes and are adversely affected by tax increases. Many elderly residents are moving into apartments to combat the high cost of homeownership.



There are only four shelters in the region for victims of domestic violence and they are located in Thomas, Dougherty and Colquitt counties. More shelters are needed as well as more transitional housing that promotes permanent residency. These shelters lack adequate capacity, so some residents must seek assistance from neighboring counties. According to facility case managers the available shelters cannot accommodate the need. Many residents must find shelters outside of their county and region to find safety.

Many communities in the region do not have facilities to accommodate special needs populations and low-income family housing. The more populated counties such as Dougherty and Thomas have the largest number of homeless persons. The recent economic downturn has given rise to foreclosures which has substantially increased the number of people experiencing housing crisis. Many people in Southwest Georgia are living in overcrowded situations with family members and are on the brink of homelessness. Nationally, many elderly are facing homelessness in increasing numbers. In addition to the elderly who are facing housing crisis for the first time, there are also chronically homeless adults who are aging on the streets. Many are often diagnosed with a host of medical problems, and may suffer from a range of complex health, mental health, and substance abuse issues. These individuals require intensive case management services which are an integral part of the transition into permanent housing. Mental health staff in the region often finds it difficult to finding transitional/temporary housing and other resources for this group, particularly with recent closures of some state hospitals. This is an ever increasing problem.

To facilitate the development of special needs housing, many communities will need to revise their zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations so that higher densities are permitted and that community residences, retirement living facilities and family day-care facilities are permitted uses within all residential zoning use districts. A few counties in our region (Thomas, Mitchell, Dougherty) are moving in that direction.

Jobs-Housing Balance

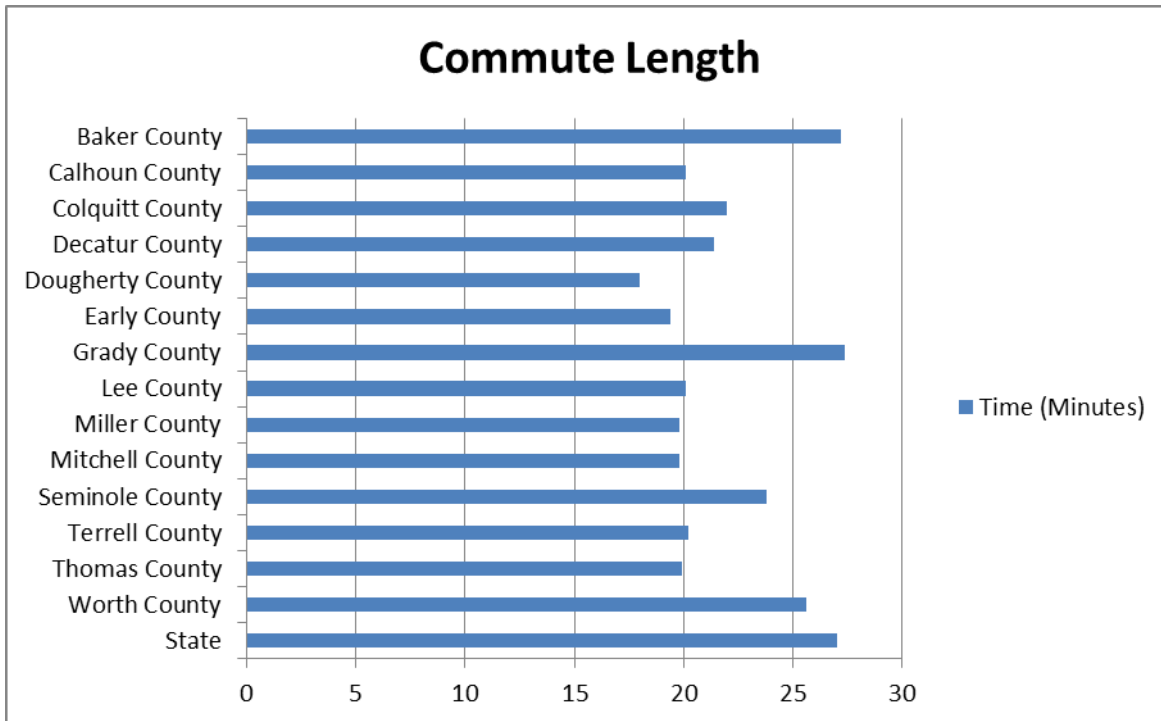
A carefully planned community has a relatively even ratio of jobs-to-housing. Ideally, such a balance allows people to go to work without having to commute long distances. The cost of housing ranges from a low about \$50,000 to a high of almost \$140,000. In comparison, the average worker makes about \$10 per hour which makes purchasing a house difficult. Every county in the region struggles to bring "high paying" jobs to their community, and with economic downturns, it is even more important for communities to support and encourage small business growth and development. Looking at the actual numbers, Colquitt, Decatur, Dougherty, Grady, Lee, Miller and Worth counties offer the most employment for neighboring counties and had the highest increases in labor force participation over the past ten years. Most of the employment has been in the areas of management, sales, production, manufacturing and government. In order for the incomes of most households to increase more high paying jobs will be required.

County	Baker	Calhoun	Colquitt	Decatur	Dougherty	Early	Grady	Lee	Miller	Mitchell	Seminole	Terrell	Thomas	Worth
Popula- tion	3409	6630	44850	27504	93442	10924	24618	27911	6054	23267	8642	9229	44175	21446
Em- ployed	1199	2243	20,584	11,008	36,851	4262	10393	13951	2752	8480	2986	3531	16764	8844

(Georgia Department of Labor Statistics November 2016)

The new information/high tech based economy encourages businesses to travel and these companies are less anchored than traditional businesses. Also the widespread use of new telecommunication technology has reduced the need for employees to travel to centralized work centers sites; they can work from home or at satellite work sites just as efficiently. This reinforces the natural inclination of new job growth to locate in communities like Dougherty and Lee where housing is in plentiful supply and continues to force many individuals to work in one county and live in another.

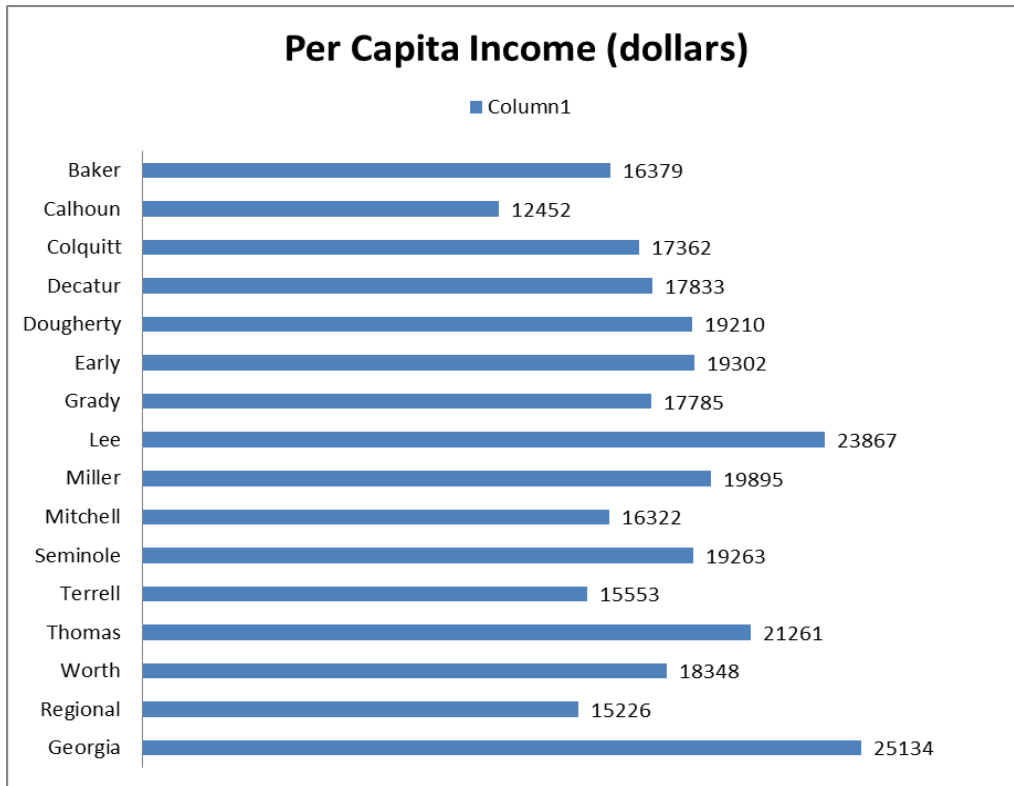
For the majority of Americans, a half hour or longer commute is average. A person living in southwest Georgia commutes an average of 23 miles per day to work. For counties where workers are employed in one county (such as Lee and Worth) but carry their paychecks home to another county, it signifies a poor jobs-to-housing ratio. Baker County cannot compete with Dougherty, Thomas and Decatur Counties, who are able to draw a diversity of workers and jobs. For the most part, individuals move to be closer to where they work (American Housing Survey).



Before owner occupied housing can increase in the region, the number of rental housing units must also increase, because new residents often prefer to rent for a while before buying. Housing opportunities for new workers are also important because without adequate housing, workers are forced to live outside of the community in which they work which dilutes the overall economic impact of new local developments. Until communities can offer more job opportunities, more residents will continue to commute or move to where the jobs are located. With cross county commuting to neighboring counties, particularly Dougherty, Thomas, Mitchell and Decatur, development of a regional economic development strategy that links transportation corridors is vital.

Per Capita Income

Per capita income is influenced by a variety of factors, namely education, which is also a general quality of life indicator. Low incomes severely limit the type and size of housing residents can afford.



In our region, the housing market doesn't provide affordable housing at the level most workers need. Lee, Thomas, Dougherty Early, Miller and Seminole Counties have the highest per capita incomes, which range from \$19,000 to about \$23,000, still below the state average of almost \$26,000.

The low incomes in the region are a barrier to affordable housing when the working class is unable to purchase the housing that is being built.

Most jobs that residents prefer are not next door. Most are in the next county which in most cases is at least 30 miles away. To allow people to live closer to their place of employment, planners and developers are tasked with achieving an adequate jobs-to-housing ratio. For the jobs to housing balance to work in a community other things have to work: education, job skills, and jobs-household structure balance.

The jobs in the region have not kept pace with the housing and most counties lack enough housing for the people who live there. In addition, because of our low educational attainments, communities cannot attract high tech/high paying jobs required to increase household salaries and incomes. In order for households to be able to afford a house they must have a 62 job that pays at least enough to pay the mortgage.

Community Facilities and Services

Water Supply and Treatment.

Southwest Georgia has an abundant supply of ground water which is the source of all municipal and individual potable water supplies in the Region. The Region overlays one of the world's largest ground water systems and is of excellent quality. Groundwater is utilized for municipal, commercial, industrial and agricultural use within the Region. All the cities have municipal water supply and distribution systems. The unincorporated areas, aside from urban fringe areas and industrial parks are not served by water distribution systems

Thirty-seven cities in Southwest Georgia provide public water service. There are some public suppliers of water in Southwest Georgia that provide service outside of their jurisdictional boundaries. For the most part, these cities offer limited service to residential and commercial developments adjacent to city limits. In the year 2010, 84% of the region's population was served by a public water supply.

City/County	WATER RATES		
	Services Provided W- Water S- Sewer B- Both	Number of Water Connections	Average Water Rate (Based on 5,000 gal per month)
Albany	B	33,473	\$15.58
Arlington	B	750	\$24.55
Attapulcus	W	300	\$9.76
Baconton	B	379	\$20.17
Bainbridge	B	5563	\$16.01
Berlin	W	217	\$22.50
Blakely	B	2057	\$23.25
Brinson	W	126	\$25.15
Bronwood	W	234	\$25.00
Cairo	B	4386	\$17.70
Camilla	B	2639	\$15.55
Climax	W	177	\$27.00
Colquitt	B	944	\$27.60
Coolidge	B	285	\$20.00
Damascus	W	112	\$45.00
Dawson	B	2163	\$19.50
Doerun	B	435	\$23.10
Donalsonville	B	1200	\$32.20
Edison	B	603	\$17.55
Funston	W	215	\$16.00
Iron City	W	134	\$10.00
Leary	B	234	\$21.00
Lee County	B	4501	\$30.25
Leesburg	B	1317	\$21.00
Morgan	W	130	\$10.00
Moultrie	B	6935	\$27.55
Newton	W	305	\$14.00
Norman Park	B	484	\$18.25
Ochlocknee	B	325	\$14.00
Parrott	W	139	\$24.00
Pelham	B	1635	\$22.90
Smithville	B	323	\$18.60
Sumner	W	210	\$27.00
Sylvester	B	2460	\$26.25
Thomasville	B	9230	\$24.63
Warwick	W	214	25.06
Whigham	W	380	\$22.98

Many local water systems need major improvements. Many systems are relatively old and are in need of repair. Many municipalities depend solely on CDBG funding to make upgrades to improve lines which is a very competitive process that is not guaranteed. Due to very low water and sewer rates in Southwest Georgia many municipalities cannot afford the large capital improvement that is necessary to upgrade and repair the systems. Loans are often overlooked due to the necessity of raising water rates to an already impoverished region. The majority of homes and businesses within the unincorporated portions of the Region are served by private wells and water systems.

Forecasts of increases in municipal and industrial demand for the Region are relatively insignificant due to the modest population growth projected in Southwest Georgia. Municipal water demand in Southwest Georgia is projected to be adequately met through the planning period given any future allocation scenario since municipal water supply is the State of Georgia's first priority. However, lowering of the ground water tables in the Region from other uses could potentially impact the supply of water at wells providing municipal water supply.

Most of the Southwest Georgia Region is located within a Significant Groundwater Recharge Area and most of that area is considered to have a High Pollution Susceptibility. Given the breadth of this sensitive environmental area, the future prevalence and concentration septic tanks serving individual residential developments within the region must be considered as an important regional issue.

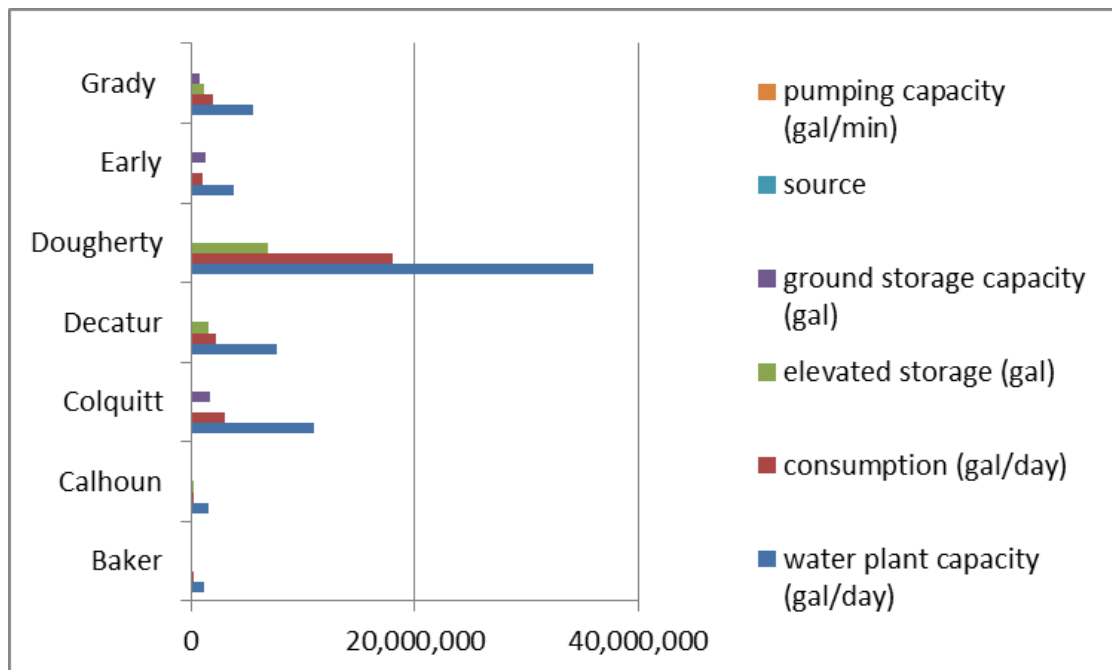
For decades, the states of Georgia, Alabama and Florida has been involved in a tri-state water debate recently which remains unresolved. The implications of the outcome of these water issues leave the use and utilization of water in Georgia hard to define. Many of the issues related to future water use and allocation in the Region are related to the dynamics between the surface water flows and the groundwater in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint river basins and the surface water flow across the State line into the Apalachicola River and Bay in Florida. Significant increases in the demand for agricultural water have been recorded within the past ten years and its importance to the economy of the Southwest Georgia has become vital.

Sewage System and Wastewater Treatment

The unincorporated areas, aside from urban fringe areas and industrial parks are not served by sanitary sewer systems. Septic systems are used in areas not served by sanitary sewer systems. Although septic systems can cause groundwater pollution problems they are generally not an issue in the region due to the lack of population density where the systems are utilized.

	Baker	Calhoun	Colquitt	Decatur	Dougherty	Early	Grady
water plant capacity (gal/day)	1,080,000	1,584,000	11,000,000	7,700,000	36,000,000	3,750,000	5,500,000
consumption (gal/day)	200,000	264,000	3,000,000	2,200,000	18,000,000	1,000,000	2,000,000
elevated storage (gal)	60,000	235,000	-	1,500,000	6,800,000	-	1,100,000
ground storage capacity (gal)	-	-	1,675,000	-	-	1,250,000	750,000
source	1 deep well	2 deep wells		3 deep wells	30 deep wells	3 deep wells	6 deep wells
pumping capacity (gal/min)	750	1,100		5,550		2,050	4,000

Sewage treatment is provided by the cities of Arlington, Leesburg, Leary, Edison, Moultrie, Cairo, Colquitt, Baconton, Camilla, Pelham, Donaldsonville, Dawson, Thomasville, Boston, Coolidge, Ochlocknee, Meigs, Sylvester, Albany-Dougherty County and Lee County. The majority of the city systems have ample reserve capacity. The cities of Sylvester and Thomasville also extend service into selected unincorporated areas. In the Region's unincorporated areas, the septic tank provides the solution to waste disposal. Planned sewage system improvements will meet the needs of the community over the planning period.



The provisions of service in the larger cities are basically adequate to meet the growth projected. Development of sewage treatment facilities in smaller cities is often financially prohibitive as a result of customer base. However, the provision of sewer treatment would be beneficial in terms of attracting commercial and industrial development.

The use of individual septic tanks is proliferating throughout the region, particularly in response to residential development in the unincorporated areas. There are several concentrated areas of residential development in Decatur, Grady, Seminole, Thomas and Worth Counties, that could become an environmentally sensitive issue over the planning period.

The current level of municipal service provided within each community is generally adequate, although there are certainly areas where extensions and improvements to local systems are warranted. For the most part, however, individual systems will grow with their populations. If greater emphasis is placed on promoting growth in urban centers, the need for improved and extended systems will follow annexations and or updated service delivery strategies. Nearly every industrial park in the Region has adequate water and sewer capacity to keep up with the demand for growth.

Other Facilities and Services

Fire Protection

The International Standard for Standardization (ISO) collects information on municipal fire-protection efforts in communities throughout the United States, analyzes the data, and assigns a Public Protection Classification from 1 to 10. Class 1 represents superior property fire protection, and Class 10 indicates that the area's fire-suppression program doesn't meet ISO's minimum criteria. These criteria include but are not limited to fire station service areas, station staffing, the availability of public water, pumping and storage capacity among others. The class in which a community is placed plays a major role in determining individual fire insurance rates. According to the ISO, a fire station should have an efficient service area of five miles in any direction from the station. The ISO recommends that each non-reserve piece of equipment should be staffed with six firefighters.

Fire protection is one of the greatest concerns when developing land use regulations. In the long run, land use regulations can improve the efficiency of the fire protection service and reduce the impact of a fire when one occurs. For the Southwest Georgia Region, the larger cities typically have paid professional fire departments and for the most part, the smaller unincorporated areas have volunteer fire departments. The majority of the fire departments (both professional and volunteer) have informal mutual agreements for back up protection services.

Fire Insurance Classification	City/County	# of Full-Time employees	# of Volunteer Employees	Additional Information
1				
2				
3	Albany/Dougherty	138	25	
	Moultrie	35		
	Thomas	55		Protection outside city limits
	Cairo/Grady	17	15	Protection outside city limits
4	Decatur	42		Protection outside city limits
5	Blakely	12	12	Protection outside city limits
	Donalsonville	8		
	Sylvester	11		
	Terrell	13	10	Protection outside city limits - 4 county fire trucks
	Camilla	4		
6	Pelham	2		
7	Colquitt	1		
	Calhoun		7	
	Baker	2	18	
	Colquitt Co.	7	10	Protection outside city limits
8	Leesburg	1	10	
9	Early		77	
	Lee		50	
	Miller		34	3 fully equipped fire stations - 2 EMT
	Mitchell		15	
	Seminole		11	
	Worth			Protection outside city limits

Public Safety

Generally police functions are handled by municipal police departments in the incorporated areas, and county sheriff's departments in unincorporated areas. In several of the smaller cities (Baconton, Funston) there are no police departments and the cities depend on the sheriff's department.

Law Enforcement

The Georgia constitution allows for each county to maintain certain services. In the area of law enforcement, the Sheriff and their deputies are primarily responsible to the court system and to operate and maintain the county jail facilities. Additional duties include providing security at the courthouse and serving judicial warrants. The local Sheriff's Departments and jail facilities are considered to be of regional significance in that they serve all of the unincorporated areas within the County. As the trends in crimes continue to rise, opportunities exist for the public safety entities to study the potential for cross-training of their public safety personnel.

Police Departments are not of regional significance; however, they do contribute to the overall public safety and welfare of the local communities. The Georgia Bureau of Investigations (GBI) and the Georgia State Patrol Offices serve as resources for the local law enforcement agencies. Often the GBI and the Georgia State Patrol Officers offer technical assistance and back up support to the smaller jurisdictions that need assistance in investigating crimes, assessing crime scenes, and drug enforcement. There are several smaller jurisdictions that do not have police departments and depend on Sheriff, other local municipalities or the state for assistance. The tables below identifies coverage for region:

County	Safety Department	Communities Served	County	Safety Department	Communities Served
Baker	Baker County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area	Lee	Lee County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area
	Newton Police Dept.	City of Newton		Leesburg Police Dept.	City of Leesburg
	Calhoun County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area		Smithville Police Dept.	City of Smithville
Calhoun		City of Morgan	Miller	Miller County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area
	Arlington Police Dept.	City of Arlington		Colquitt County Police Dept.	City of Colquitt
	Edison Police Dept.	City of Edison		Mitchell County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area
	Leary Police Dept.	City of Leary			City of Baconton
Colquitt	Colquitt County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area	Mitchell	Camilla Police Dept.	City of Camilla
		City of Ellenton		Pelham Police Dept.	City of Pelham
		City of Funston		Sale City Police Dept.	City of Sale City
		City of Riverside		Seminole County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area
	Doerun Police Dept.	City of Doerun	Seminole	Donalsonville Police Dept.	City of Donalsonville
	Moultrie Police Dept.	City of Moultrie		Terrell County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area
	Norman Park Police Dept.	City of Norman Park			City of Bronwood
	Berlin Police Dept.	City of Berlin			City of Parrott
	Decatur County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area	Terrell		City of Sasser
		City of Brinson		Dawson Police Dept.	City of Dawson
Decatur	Bainbridge Public Safety	City of Bainbridge		Thomas County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area
	Climax Police Dept.	City of Climax	Thomas		City of Ochlocknee
	Attapulgus Police Dept.	City of Attapulgus		Boston Police Dept.	City of Boston
	Dougherty County Sheriff's Dept.	County-wide		Coolidge Police Dept.	City of Coolidge
Dougherty	Albany Police Dept.	City of Albany		Meigs Police Dept.	City of Meigs
	Dougherty County Police Dept.	Unincorporated Area		Thomasville Police Dept.	City of Thomasville
	Early County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area	Worth	Worth County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area
Early		City of Jakin			City of Sumner
	Blakely Police Dept.	City of Blakely		Sylvester Police Dept.	City of Sylvester
	Damascus Police Dept.	City of Damascus		Poulan Police Dept.	City of Poulan
Grady	Grady County Sheriff's Dept.	Unincorporated Area		Warwick Police Dept.	City of Warwick
	Cairo Police Dept.	City of Cairo			
	Whigham Police Dept.	City of Whigham			

Emergency Medical Services

Emergency Medical Service (EMS) is an important component of public safety as well. These services are a fundamental part of public safety and should be considered along with fire and police protection. EMS provides pre-hospital care and transportation to hospitals. EMS also serves the community by providing first aid and CPR training sessions to the general public, and by offering free blood pressure screenings. All of the counties in the Southwest Georgia Region have Emergency Medical Services and participate with E-911.

Parks and Recreation

All cities contain at least one municipal park, ranging from small sub-acre parks with picnic tables and barbecue grills to larger parks with amenities such as swimming pools, tennis courts, and full-time staff depending on the size and budget of the city. The smallest cities often depend on county funds for park maintenance.

Generally recreational facilities that involve playing fields and team participation such as baseball, soccer, basketball, tennis and facilities for active recreation are found within cities. Recreation without fields, more generally trail-based hiking, mountain biking, horse-back riding, wildlife viewing, picnicking, etc. is found within the unincorporated areas. The region has an abundance of wildlife management areas and conservation areas, three state parks, water resources suitable for recreation such as boating and fishing such as the Flint River and Lake Seminole, in addition to numerous hunting plantations.

Seminole State Park

Seminole State Park, consisting of 37,500 acres, is located in the “Y” at the intersection of the Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers at the southern tip of both Seminole County and the Southwest Georgia Region. Lake Seminole is an excellent source of freshwater fishing, and is known for its largemouth, hybrid, striped and white bass fishing. Seminole State Park also has several boat landings, fishing piers, a swimming area, cabins, recreational vehicle camping, tent camping, and a marina. Lake Seminole is the site of many annual fishing tournaments which contribute to the local economies of Bainbridge, Donalsonville, and rural Seminole County. Seminole State Park is owned and operated by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. The site is protected by the state’s ownership and is not threatened by inappropriate land uses.

Reed Bingham State Park

Reed Bingham State Park, located in Colquitt County, consists of 1,620 acres of land used for nature trails, bicycle trails, miniature golf, fishing, swimming, and passive recreation. Programs offered include activities such as campfire chats, movies, and scavenger hunts. Reed Bingham State Park is owned and operated by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. The site is protected by the state's ownership and is not threatened by inappropriate land uses.

Kolomoki Mounds Historic Park

This historically significant park is the oldest and largest Woodland Indian site in the southeastern U.S., occupied by American Indians from 350 to 750 A.D. Georgia's oldest great temple mound, standing 57 feet high, dominates two smaller burial mounds and several ceremonial mounds. The park's museum is built around an excavated mound, providing an unusual setting for learning who these people were and how they lived. Inside, visitors will find numerous artifacts and a film. Outdoor activities include camping, fishing, picnicking and boating. Hikers can choose from two scenic trails. The Spruce Pine Trail offers views of lakes Yahola and Kolomoki, while the Trillium Trail meanders through hardwoods and pines.

Wildlife Management Areas

The Southwest Georgia Region has seven Wildlife Management Areas and two nature areas, which contribute to tourism and economic development in the area. These areas contain habitat favorable to many plants and animals and therefore draw many visitors each year.

Southwest Georgia Wildlife Management Areas and Natural Areas		
<u>Name</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Acreage</u>
Albany Nursery WMA	Dougherty	300
Chickasawhatchee WMA	Baker, Calhoun, Dougherty	19,700
Doerun Pitcherplant Bog	Colquitt	600
Elmodel WMA	Baker	1,600
Lake Seminole WMA	Seminole & Decatur	19,700
Mayhaw WMA	Miller	6,300
River Creek WMA	Thomas	2,600
Silver Lake WMA	Decatur	9,200
Wolf Creek Preserve NA	Grady	140

Albany Nursery Wildlife Management Area

Albany Nursery WMA is a 300 acre area that provides for hunting, interpretive trail, bird watching, field trail access, canoe access, and horseback riding. The site is located 10 miles west of Albany.

Chickasawhatchee Wildlife Management Area

The Chickasawhatchee Wildlife Management Area covers 22,000 acres of mixed hardwoods interspersed with low-lying swamp areas in Baker, Calhoun, and Dougherty Counties. The habitat is favorable for deer, gray squirrels and rabbits among many other animal species. The area is owned by St. Joe Paper Company and leased to the state for wildlife management and recreation. The Chickasawhatchee Wildlife Management Area is operated and protected by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

Doerun Pitcher Plant Bog Natural Area

Pitcher plants are carnivorous plants whose prey-trapping mechanism features a deep cavity filled with liquid known as a pitfall trap. The Doerun Pitcher Plant Bog covers over 600 acres. Hunting and bird watching are amenities that are available in the Bog area. The site is located 10 miles northwest of Moultrie.

Elmodel Wildlife Management Area

Elmodel Wildlife Management Area is 1,600 acres of land located 8 miles North of Newton. Canoe access and hunting are permitted.

Lake Seminole Water Fowl Wildlife Management Area

The Lake Seminole Water Fowl Wildlife Management Area consists of 16,895 acres in DeKalb and Seminole Counties. The Lake Seminole Water Fowl Wildlife Management Area is operated and protected by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

Mayhaw Wildlife Management Area

The Mayhaw Wildlife Management Area is utilized primarily as a game preserve and plays an important role in hunting based tourism. It consists of 5,430 acres of land in Miller County. However, a small portion of the Mayhaw Wildlife Management area is located in eastern Early County along the Miller County border. The Mayhaw Wildlife Management Area is operated and protected by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

Silver Lake Wildlife Management Area

Silver Lake WMA is a remnant tract of predominately longleaf pine forest in Decatur County. The some 8,400 acres is known as the Silver Lake tract. This tract was part of a 16,000-acre forest known as the Southlands Experimental Forest, which was established in 1948 for forestry research because it represented habitats characteristic of many of the pine habitats within the Southeast, including areas supporting all four of the major southern pines -- longleaf, loblolly, slash and shortleaf. The property is along the shore of Lake Seminole near Bainbridge.

Silver Lake was also designated as a mitigation site for red-cockaded woodpeckers found on other tracts owned by International Paper, with plans of eventually supporting up to 30 red-cockaded woodpecker family groups.

Wolf Creek Preserve Natural Area

Wolf Creek Preserve is located in Grady County. The 140 acre site is home to the greatest expanse of trout lilies known to exist. The preserve is also home to several other species of orchids, trilliums, violets, oak, pine, beech, magnolia and hickory..

Rolf and Alexandra Kauka Wildlife Management Area (also known as: River Creek Wildlife Management Area)

River Creek WMA is a 2,437 acre site located in Thomas County. The Wildlife Management Area is home to the red-cockaded woodpecker. Located in Thomas County, River Creek, the Rolf and Alexandra Kauka Wildlife Management Area (WMA) protect 4.2 miles of frontage along the scenic Ochlockonee River, with bottomland pine-hardwood forests as well as upland longleaf pine forest and four miles along Barnett's Creek.

Stormwater Management

There are only three local issuing authorities in Southwest Georgia: Albany, Dougherty County and Lee County receive phase II NPDES coverage under a general permit.

Solid Waste Management Facilities

Most counties have facilities that accept yard wastes for county residents. Most are the old county landfills that no longer accept municipal solid waste. Some old landfills (pre-Title 8) also allow residents to dump construction and demolition materials in addition to yard waste. There are four active Title 8 landfills in the region accepting municipal solid waste and three transfer stations. Much of the region's waste is disposed of outside the region.

Southwest Georgia Disposal and Capacity									
County	Facility Name	Total Tons Disposed FY 2003	Do-main	Facility Type	Remain-ing Ca-pacity (CY)	Aver-age Daily Tons	Rat e of Fill (CY D)	Estimat-ed Fill Date	Remain-ing Per-mitted Capacity (years)
C&D									
Dougherty	Dougherty Co. – Fleming/Gaissert Road	150,985	Public	MSWL	425,419	252	160	3/13/12	10.2
	Maple Hill Landfill		Public			150			
Thomas	Thomasville/ Sunset Drive	21,187	Public	C&D	538,541	77	147	11/29/16	14.1
MSW									
Decatur	Decatur Co – S.R 309 Bainbridge	28,225	Public	Unlined MSWL	185,042	90	181	9/14/10	3.9
Dougherty	Dougherty Co.- Fleming/Gaissert Rd.	128,497	Public	MSWL	4,557,838	317	733	10/26/23	23.9
Grady	Cairo – Sixth Ave	22,924	Public	Unlined MSWL	425,923	92	184	8/6/12	8.9
Thomas	Thomasville/Sunset Dr	94,367	Public	MSWL	3,143,115	343	591	11/29/22	20.5
All Information pertaining to annual tonnage, remaining landfill capacity and estimated closure dates was supplied by EPD. Both (C&D) and (L) designations include construction and demolition landfills, while (MSWL) and (SL) designate municipal solid waste landfills. Estimated fill rates by region are cumulative, using average daily fill rates based on 260 operating days per year and remaining capacity reported to EPD.									

Schools

Southwest Georgia has a comprehensive education system that serves 67,984 students. The School Systems employ over 4,455 teachers and are an economic engine for many of the communities they serve. The education system has 98 Public Schools and 23 Private schools to serve the needs of a growing population.

The Post-secondary education is also available throughout Southwest Georgia with three technical schools and several satellite locations being within 20 miles of most locations in Southwest Georgia. Two year schools are also available throughout the region with Darton, Brewton Parker and Bainbridge College fulfilling that need as well as operating several satellite training opportunities throughout the region. Several 4-year schools offer Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Art degrees. While the chart below shows colleges that are within the region several communities may take advantage of additional colleges and universities that are within a close proximity to them including Valdosta State University, Florida State University, University of Florida, Georgia Southwestern State University to name a few.

COUNTY	# of Public Schools	# of private/charter Schools	# of Students	# of 2015 Graduates
Baker	1		301	20
Calhoun	3	1 Charter	641	29
Colquitt	13	1 Private	9,697	529
Decatur	9	1 Private	5,230	313
Dougherty	26	11 Private	14,946	772
Early	3	1 Private	2,158	135
Grady	7		4,681	237
Lee	6		6,447	399
Miller	3	1 Private	1,036	60
Mitchell	5 County, 3 City	1 Charter, 1 Private	3,894	196
Seminole	2		1,538	104
Terrell	3		1,419	91
Thomas	5 County, 5 City	5 Private	8,782	455
Worth	5		3,329	177

Source: Georgia Department of Education Data and Reporting Division

Technical College	2 Year College	4 Year College
Albany Technical College (Albany Georgia)	Darton College (Albany, Georgia) Consolidation with Albany State University effective January 2017	Albany State University (Albany, Georgia)
Southern Regional Technical College (Moultrie, Georgia)	Bainbridge College (Bainbridge, Georgia)	ABAC on the Square (Moultrie, Georgia)
Southern Regional Technical College (Thomasville, Georgia)		Troy State University (Albany, Georgia)
		Thomas University (Thomasville, Georgia)

Intergovernmental Coordination

Certain issues in the region are best dealt with in a coordinated manner, rather than by individual governments or authorities acting on their own. In many some cases, local governments work together, either on an informal basis or through jointly-controlled agencies. State or federal regulations provide standards, which may be voluntary or mandatory.

Economic Development

Cooperation is important to promote economic development. Local governments often lack resources to promote their economic potential without cooperation. The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a broad-based, continuous planning process developed by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) that addresses the economic opportunities of the region. There are also a number of joint development authorities, Chambers of Commerce and Industrial Parks that include multiple governments.

Service Delivery Strategy

The service delivery strategy is a document that specifies how certain services and related facilities are provided within counties. Services include water, sewer, solid waste, road maintenance, jails, police, fire, E-911, EMS, economic development, animal control, etc. The service delivery strategy is where intergovernmental coordination and cooperation is outlined.

Flint River Basin Regional Water Plan

The Flint River Regional Water Development and Conservation Plan is a comprehensive review of water development, conservation, and sustainable use. It promotes the conservation and reuse of water, guards against a shortage of water, and promote efficient use of the water resources over much of the region.

Lower Flint Regional Water Plan

The State Water Plan requires the development of regional water plans. The Lower Flint Regional Water Plan, to be developed by the Lower Flint Regional Water Plan Councils will determine the preferred water management practices to meet the region's future water resources needs. The recommended regional water plan, which must be submitted to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division by June 30, 2011, will identify a range of expected future water needs for the region.

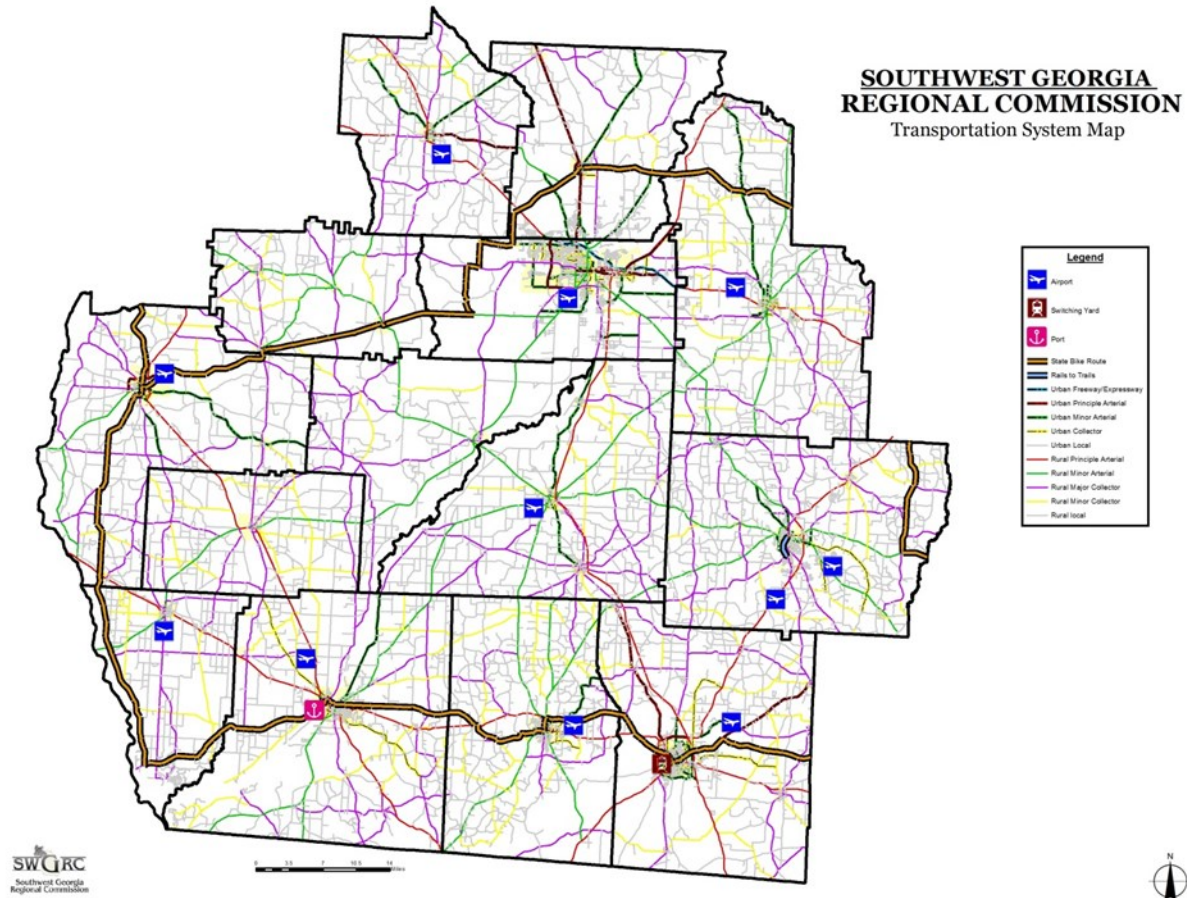
Regionally Important Resource Plan

The intent of the plan is to provide an enhanced focus on protection and management of important natural and cultural resources throughout the region, careful consideration of, and planning for, impacts of new development on these important resources, and improved local, and regional coordination for the protection and management of these important resources.

Regional Transit

The SWGRC works closely with the Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR) to promote the efficient use of available transportation resources as a broker for the Southwest DHR region. The system is now operating more than 75 vehicles providing transit services to the public and the Division of Aging Services, Department of Family and Children Services, Mental Health, Development Disabilities and Addictive Disease, and Public Health and Rehabilitation Services. This program currently provides approximately 400,000 trips annually. In addition, our regional rural public transit service provides nearly 175,000 trips per year to work, businesses for shopping, and other activities.

Transportation System



Road Network

The regional road network is generally adequate to serve the transportation needs of the area. There are several significant highways that connect the area including U.S. Highways 84, 19, 319 and 82. Each of these is predominately a divided four-lane facility with speed limits up to 65 miles per hour. These arterials connect the larger population centers to each other and surrounding regions. U.S. Highway 27, runs north-south through the southwestern section of the region into Tallahassee, Florida. Over the past several years, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) has been widening the road into a four-lane divided highway and developing by-passes around most towns. Construction is complete within the region, but remains unfinished just to the north. The intent is in part to provide an alternative north-south route to Interstate 75. In addition, it is seen as providing additional commercial opportunities to the region and has been supported mostly for this reason.

U.S. Highways 19 and 319 also run north-south through the southwest region into Florida as well. In addition, Highway 133, which connects Albany and Valdosta, is in the process of being four-laned to provide greater access to markets for commercial development, particularly by its connection to Interstate 75. The highway project has received strong local support. Nonetheless, the following table below provides a listing of the existing highways and bridges located within the 14 counties that comprise the region:

COUNTY	FACILITY TYPE	FACILITY NAME	ROUTE	LOCATION
Baker	Bridge	James Henderson Hall, Sr. Bridge	SR 37	Flint River
	Road	Peter Zack Greer Highway	SR 91	Section of SR 91 from South Albany City Limits to the Herman Talmadge Bridge South of Donaldsonville
	Road	Charles F. Hatcher Highway	SR 37	Portion of SR 37 in Baker County Between Newton and EL Model
Calhoun	Road	Gil Barrett Highway	SR 234	SR 234 from N. Slappey Dr. in Albany to SR 55 in Calhoun County
	Road	Harvey Jordan Memorial Highway SR 37	SR 37	From Leary to Morgan
	Road	Calvin W. Schramm Highway	SR 216	From Intersection with SR 37 in Edison to Randolph County Line
	Road	Charles and Mary Cowart Bypass	SR 45 Alternate, SR 45, SR 62, SR 216	Portion of SR 45 Alternate in Calhoun County from the Intersection of SR 45, SR 62, SR 216, and Cedar Street to the Junction of SR 45 Alternate with SR 45
Colquitt	Road	Scooterville Highway	SR 256	From Sylvester City Limits to Norman Park City Limits
	Road	Sunbelt Highway	SR 133	From Albany to Moultrie
	Road	Billy Langdale Parkway	SR 133	From Radium Springs Road in Albany to West Hill Ave. in Valdosta
	Road	Veterans Parkway	US 319	US Highway 319 East Bypass from the Intersection of State Route 33 to the Intersection of State Highway 35 in Colquitt County
	Road	Edward Sidney "Dick" Chambers Memorial Highway	SR 37	Portion of SR 27 within the Funston City Limits

COUNTY	FACILITY TYPE	FACILITY NAME	ROUTE	LOCATION
Decatur	Bridge	Emmett Culbreth/Myrvin Culbreth Bridges	SR 1	Flint River in Bainbridge
	Road	Wiregrass Georgia Parkway	US 84	From Alabama Line Eastward to Clinch/Ware County Line
	Road	Walter E. Cox Parkway	SR 1, US 27	From Miller County Line to Florida Line
	Road	Lt. Col. Doyce Ariail Highway	SR 38	Portion of SR 38 Passing through the City of Climax
	Road	Jack Wingate Highway	SR 97	SR 97 in Decatur County from the US 84 Bypass
	Road	Bobby Walden Highway	US 84, SR 38	Portion of U.S. Highway 84 in Decatur County from Grady County line west to the traffic light at Whigham Dairy Road within the limits of the Wiregrass Ga. Parkway
Dougherty	Road	John B. Gordon Highway	SR 3	Through Georgia from Tennessee to Florida Line
	Road	Georgia-Florida Parkway	SR 300	From I-75 South of Cordele through Albany, Camilla, and Thomasville to Florida line
	Road	Sunbelt Parkway	SR 133	From Albany to Moultrie
	Road	Billy Langdale Parkway	SR 133	From Radium Springs Road in Albany to West Hill Ave. in Valdosta
	Road	Peter Zack Geer Highway	SR 91	Section of SR 91 from south Albany City Limits to Herman Talmadge Bridge south of Donalsonville
	Road	Gil Barrett Highway	SR 234	SR 234 from N. Slappey Drive in Albany to SR 5 in Calhoun County
Early	Road	Chattahoochee Valley Trail Scenic Highway	SR 39	Omaha to Lake Seminole
	Road	Wiregrass Georgia Parkway	US 84	Alabama line to Clinch/Ware County Line
	Road	S.G. Maddox Memorial	SR 1, US 27	From Clay County line south to Miller County line
	Road	Joe Bryan Highway	SR 45	From Miller County line and ending at the Calhoun County line
Grady	Road	Plantation Parkway	US 319	From south City Limits of Thomasville to Florida line
	Road	Wiregrass Georgia Parkway	US 84	From Alabama line to Clinch/Ware County line
	Road	Jackie Robinson Memorial Parkway	SR 93	From US 319 to US 84
	Road	Julien B. Roddenbery, Sr. Memorial	SR 38	1 st Avenue N.E.
Lee	Road	John B. Gordon Highway	SR 3	Through Georgia from Tennessee to Florida Line
	Road	Kermit Blaney Parkway	SR 520	From Cusseta City Limits to Albany City limits
	Bridge	E.L. Massey Jr. Bridge	SR 118	Bridge over Kinchafoonee Creek
	Road	James M. Cannon, Sr. Memorial Bypass	US 19	U.S. Highway 19 Bypass
	Road	Chambers Crossing	US 19	U.S. Route 19 with Century Road
Miller	Road	Chattahoochee Valley Trail Scenic Highway	SR 39	Omaha to Lake Seminole
	Road	Peter Zack Geer Highway	SR 91	From south Albany City Limits to the Herman Talmadge Bridge South of Donalsonville

COUNTY	FACILITY TYPE	FACILITY NAME	ROUTE	LOCATION
Mitchell	Road	John B. Gordon Highway	SR 3	From Mitchell County to Florida line
	Road	Georgia-Florida Parkway	SR 300	From I-75 South of Cordele through Albany, Camilla, and Thomasville to Florida line
	Road	George T. Smith Highway	SR 97	From Camilla City Limits to SR 262
Seminole	Road	Chattahoochee Valley Trail Scenic Highway	SR 39	Omaha to Lake Seminole
	Road	Wiregrass Georgia Parkway	US 84	From Alabama line to Clinch/ Ware County line
	Road	Bartow Gibson Highway	SR 285	From SR 39 to US 84
	Road	Peter Zack Greer Highway	SR 91	From Albany City Limits to the Herman Talmadge Bridge south of Donalsonville
	Road	Lee Drake, Sr. Intersection	SR 39	SR 39 with CR 253
Terrell	Road	Kermit Blaney Parkway	SR 520	From Cusseta City Limits to Albany City Limits
	Bridge	E.L. Massey, Jr. Bridge	SR 118	Bridge over Kinchafoonee Creek
	Bridge	Kennedy Bridge	SR 45	Bridge over Bear Creek
	Bridge	Wayne T. Goode Bridge	SR 49	Bridge over Kinchafoonee Creek at Terrell/Sumter County Line
	Bridge	Sara Collier Bridge	SR 520	Bridge over Chickawahatchee Creek
Thomas	Road	John B. Gordon Highway	SR 3	
	Road	Georgia-Florida Parkway	SR 300	From Thomas County to Florida line
	Road	Plantation Parkway	US 319	From south Thomasville City Limits to Florida line
	Road	Wiregrass Georgia Parkway	US 84	From Alabama line to Clinch/ Ware County line
	Road	Will Watt Parkway	US 319, SR 35	From W. Jackson St. to SR 38 (Thomasville Bypass)
	Road	Marguerite Neel Williams Memorial Highway	SR 3, SR 300, US 19	From Lower Boston Road (CR 8) to Florida Line
	Road	Henry P. Russell, Jr. Parkway	SR 38	From eastern boundary of Thomas County to Intersection with US 19
Worth	Road	Georgia-Florida Parkway	SR 300	From I-75, south of Cordele, through Albany, Camilla, and Thomasville to the Florida line
	Road	Scooterville Highway	SR 256	From Sylvester City Limits to Norman Park City Limits
	Road	Sunbelt Parkway	SR 133	From Albany to Moultrie

Alternative Modes

There is little provision of transportation alternatives within the region. While some towns and cities within the region have sidewalks, they are primarily located in the vicinity of downtowns and historic districts. For the most part, sidewalk infrastructure is minimal to non-existent in most residential areas. The lack of sidewalk infrastructure makes it difficult to walk safely to shopping, entertainment or schools. Only a few jurisdictions require sidewalks in new development and none are making a concerted effort to install sidewalks in the rights-of-way.

Public transportation exists within certain local governments within the region. The city of Albany has a fixed-route bus system, while the remainder of the region is served by an on-demand transit system. The southwest Georgia region is one of the few rural areas in the nation to be comprehensively served by public transit. Although accessing the on-demand system can be trying to the public at times, it is currently the only system available to cost-effectively serve a sparse population.

Two state bicycle routes traverse the region; however, they are not heavily utilized, as they often follow busy roadways that lack adequate shoulders, or have shoulders with wide rumble strips that force cyclists into travel lanes. The cities of Albany and Moultrie both have multi-use, paved trails that are heavily utilized by bicyclists and pedestrians. Both cities intend to expand these facilities as funding is available. In addition, the city of Thomasville is in the initial planning stages of a multi-purpose trail that would link neighborhoods and parks with downtown.

In general, the region is sparsely populated and has lower incomes than other parts of the state. Because of these disparaging economic and demographic factors, it is difficult to provide cost effective transportation alternatives. Often times, local governments do not have the capital needed to invest in pedestrian or transit infrastructure. The previously referenced public transportation program was only made possible by the involvement of the SWGRC. The Commission implemented the program regionally and provided the necessary required local funding on the many of the local governments' behalf. The program, however, does not include Thomas County, which operates its own system.

Railroads, Trucking, Port Facilities and Airports

There are no passenger rail services within the region. Significant north-south as well as east-west rail lines traverses the region which are used exclusively for the movement of freight. The principal lines through the region follow roughly along U.S. Highway 19 and Highway 84, with only Albany and Thomasville having railroad switch yards.

The city of Bainbridge is considered an inland port due to its location on the Flint River and proximity to the Apalachicola River, which can accommodate barge travel to the Gulf of Mexico through a system of locks. The terminal covers 107 acres and includes 107,553 square feet of warehouse space. A barge terminal is operated by the Georgia Ports Authority which handles both bulk and liquid cargo.

Most of the cities with populations over 5,000 have a municipal airport. The only commercial flight service is out of the Southwest Georgia Regional Airport located in Albany. Other nearby commercial airports includes the Tallahassee Regional Airport, the Dothan Regional Airport, and the Columbus Airport.

The following data represents a break-down of the transportation facilities within the region by county, along with the distance (miles) to each facility:

Baker County

Commercial airport: Albany Airport (22 miles)

General aviation airport: Albany Airport (22 miles)

Rail: CSX piggyback - Cordele (67 miles); CSX rail - Camilla (9 miles); Norfolk Southern Rail - Camilla (9 miles) Camilla Airport (9 miles)

Navigable River: Flint River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Bainbridge (35 miles)

Seaport: Port St. Joe Seaport (90 miles) with maintained channel depth of 35 feet

Calhoun County

Commercial Airport: Albany Airport (32 miles)

General Aviation Airport: Albany Airport (32 miles)

Rail: CSX piggyback - Cordele (70 miles); CSX rail - Arlington (local); Norfolk Southern Rail - Arlington (local)

Navigable River: Chattahoochee River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Columbia (40 miles)

Seaport: Panama City Seaport (151 miles) with maintained channel depth of 35 feet

Colquitt County

Commercial Airport: Albany Airport (38 miles), Valdosta Airport (40 miles) service by ASA

General Aviation Airport: Moultrie Municipal Airport (38 miles) (*Spence Field in Moultrie has 10,000 ft. bituminous runway*)

Rail: CSX piggyback - Cordele (55 miles); CSX rail - Moultrie (local); Norfolk Southern Rail - Moultrie (local)

Navigable River: Flint River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Bainbridge (52 miles)

Seaport: Brunswick Seaport (148 miles) with maintained channel depth of 32 feet

Decatur County

Commercial Airport: Tallahassee Airport (40 miles)

General Aviation Airport: Bainbridge Airport (local)

Rail: CSX rail - Bainbridge (local). Georgia Southwestern short-line rail service (county)

Navigable River: Flint River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Bainbridge

Seaport: Port St. Joe Seaport (128 miles) with maintained channel depth of 35 feet

Dougherty County

Commercial Airport: Albany Airport (local)

General Aviation Airport: Albany Airport (local)

Rail: Norfolk Southern piggyback - Albany (local); Norfolk Southern Rail - Albany (local). Atlantic and Georgia Great Southern (local)

Navigable River: Flint River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Bainbridge (60 miles)

Seaport: Brunswick Seaport (172 miles) with maintained channel depth of 32 feet

Early County

Commercial Airport: Albany Airport (52 miles)

General Aviation Airport: Blakely Airport (local)

Rail: CSX piggyback - Cordele (80 miles); CSX rail - Blakely (local); Norfolk Southern piggyback - Macon (160 miles); Norfolk Southern Rail - Blakely (local). CIRR shortline rail service at Blakely (local)

Navigable River: Chattahoochee River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Columbia (14 miles).

Seaport: Panama City Seaport (115 miles) with maintained channel depth of 35 feet.

Grady County

Commercial Airport: Tallahassee Airport (35 miles)

General Aviation Airport: Cairo Airport (local) with a 4,000 feet bituminous runway, aircraft tie-down, airframe & power plant repair, hangar, lighted runway

Rail: CSX piggyback - Cordele (85 miles); CSX rail - Cairo (local)

Navigable River: Flint River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Bainbridge (20 miles)

Seaport: St. Mary's Seaport (158 miles) with maintained channel depth of 32 feet

Lee County

Commercial Airport: Albany Airport (10 miles)

General Aviation Airport: Albany Airport (10 miles)

Rail: CSX rail - Lee County (local); Norfolk Southern Rail - Leesburg (local)

Navigable River: Chattahoochee River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Columbus (62 miles)

Seaport: Brunswick Seaport (189 miles) with maintained channel depth of 32 feet

Miller County

Commercial Airport: Albany Airport (10 miles)

General Aviation Airport: Albany Airport (10 miles)

Rail: CSX rail - Lee County (local); Norfolk Southern Rail - Leesburg (local)

Navigable River: Chattahoochee River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Columbus (62 miles)

Seaport: Brunswick Seaport (189 miles) with maintained channel depth of 32 feet

Mitchell County

Commercial Airport: Albany Airport (25 miles)

General Aviation Airport: Albany Airport (25 miles), Camilla Airport (local)

Rail: CSX piggyback - Cordele (67 miles); CSX rail - Camilla (local); Norfolk Southern Rail - Camilla (local)

Navigable River: Flint River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Bainbridge (36 miles)

Seaport: Panama City Seaport (181 miles) with maintained channel depth of 35 feet; Port St. Joe Seaport (173 miles) with maintained channel depth of 35 feet

Seminole County

Commercial Airport: Dothan Airport (35 miles)

General aviation Airport: Donalsonville Airport (local)

Rail: CSX piggyback - Cordele (100 miles); CSX rail - Donalsonville (local)

Navigable River: Flint River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Bainbridge (18 miles)

Seaport: Panama City Seaport (100 miles) with maintained channel depth of 35 feet

Terrell County

Commercial Airport: Albany Airport (22 miles)

General Aviation Airport: Albany Airport (22 miles)

Dawson Airport (local) Navigable River: Chattahoochee River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Columbus (64 miles)

Seaport: Brunswick Seaport (193 miles) with maintained channel depth of 32 feet

Thomas County

Commercial Airport: Tallahassee Airport (35 miles)

Valdosta Airport (43 miles)

General Aviation Airport: Thomasville Airport (local)

Rail: CSX piggyback - Cordele (85 miles); CSX rail - Thomasville (local)

Navigable River: Flint River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Bainbridge (35 miles)

Seaport: Port St. Joe Seaport (150 miles) with maintained channel depth of 35 feet

Worth County

Commercial Airport: Albany Airport (21 miles)

General Aviation Airport: Albany Airport (21 miles)

Sylvester Airport (4 miles)

Rail: CSX piggyback - Cordele (31 miles). Atlantic & Gulf (local)

Navigable River: Flint River (9 foot channel depth) with public barge dock at Bainbridge (56 miles)

Seaport: Brunswick Seaport (148 miles) with maintained channel depth of 32 feet

Transportation and Land Use Connection

For the most part, southwest Georgia has adequate transportation facilities that operate below full capacity. The state highways that traverse the region are in good condition and have room for additional daily traffic without causing any significant congestion. The county roads are experiencing the same situation. The only area of potential concern is the stretch of Highway 19 south of Albany to the Dougherty County line. This area has seen significant growth of commercial enterprises along the highway as well as nearby residential areas.

For some time now, there has been an increased recognition of the importance of integrating transportation and land use planning in rural areas. Transportation investments can have a major impact on development patterns in rural areas. With that being said, the link between transportation and land use is an important relationship as it relates to the future of the southwest Georgia area. If coordinated properly, the connection between the two has the potential to result in more clearly defined and planned future growth areas, which lead to more diverse local economies within the region, lessening the area's over-reliance on agriculture related industries.

As previously evidenced, the major highway facilities that serve the area and link the region's major business districts have the capacity and potential to accommodate even more vehicle trips. Currently, due to the lack of employment (white-collar) opportunities available in the region, roadway systems such as U.S. Highway 27 and U.S. Highway 319 operating in Decatur, Grady, and Thomas Counties, for the most part, act as daily commuter routes for residents of the region employed in Tallahassee (Florida).

The region, however, has recently experienced some signs of improved coordination between transportation and land use. This is clearly evidenced by the transformation of the U.S. Highway 19 corridor, near the intersection of U.S. 84 in Thomasville. For years, the majority of the property bordering the highway was either vacant/wooded or utilized for agricultural purposes. Within the past few years, the landscape alongside the roadway facility has been converted to commercial uses ranging from big-box retail to sit down restaurants and hotels. In addition, Southwest Georgia Technical College has acquired acreage along U.S. Highway 19, expanding its already thriving campus. Other counties have also gotten into the act of land use conversion to take advantage of its road facilities. A former vacant arena/warehouse site near the junction of U.S. Highway 319 S and Highway 93 S, two miles north of the Georgia-Florida line in Grady County has been converted into the new home of high-end furniture store based out of Atlanta.

Through more effective coordination between transportation and land use planning, as depicted in the above examples, local governments comprising the southwest Georgia region have the potential to take advantage of the strengths of the existing roadway facilities, which include under-utilized adjacent lands and excess road capacity. Better coordination can also assist local governments in directing projected future growth into targeted areas.